Hinduism & Symbol Worship

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HINDUISM AND SYMBOL WORSHIP

With compliments
To
our respected Vice-Chancellor
Sri G. B. K. Hooja
By the author

17/9/83

(B.C. SINHA)

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HINDUISM
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B.C. SINHA

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यदि देहं पृथवक्कृत्य चिति विश्राम्य तिष्ठसि ।
अधुनेव सुखी शान्तो वन्धमुक्तो भविष्यसि ।।

Aṣṭāvakra Saṁhitā

If you detach yourself from the body
and rest in consciousness, you will at
once be happy, peaceful, and free
from bondage.

To
My younger brother
Ram Chandra Sinha

Preface

Symbols play a very important part in our material and spiritual life. Though they may look simple and unimportant but they are very scientific and effective. For example Tilaka is a mark of auspiciousness. The devotees of Śiva apply sacred ashes on the forehead, the devotees of Viṣṇu apply Chandan, and the worshippers of Śakti apply Kumkuma. The scriptures say, "A forehead without a Tilaka, a woman without a husband, a Mantra the meaning of which is not known while doing Japa, the head that does not bend before holy personage, a heart without mercy, a house without a well, a village without a temple, a country without a river, a society without a leader, wealth that is not given away in charity, a preceptor without a disciple, a country without a justice, a king without an able minister, a woman not obedient to her husband, a well without water, a flower without smell, a soul devoid of holiness, a field without rains, an intellect without clearness, a disciple who does not consider his preceptor as a form of God, a body devoid of health, a custom without purity, austerity devoid of fellow-feeling, speech in which truth is not the basis, a country without good people, work without wages, sanyāsa without renunciation, legs which have not performed pilgrimages, a determination unaided by Viveka, a knife which is blunt, a cow which does not give milk, a spear without a point—all these are worthy of condemnation. They exist for name's sake only." From this we can very well imagine the importance of a sacred symbol like Tilaka. It is very scientific also. Tilaka is applied on the space between the two eyebrows. It has a very cooling effect. Tilaka indicates the point at which the spiritual eye opens.

The Hindūs have innumerable symbols for worship. It is difficult to count them all. But an attempt has been made to discuss some of the most important symbols. In fact they are precious gems. Their utillty and efficacy is wonderful. Linga and Yoni are the symbols of power and fertility. A circle is a Brahm, having neither beginning nor end. The triangle is a symbol of Śiva. Water is symbolized by a cone. Trees and serpents are symbols of fertility. In the words of Edward Moor, "The Hindūs are prone to fancying a type of something mysterious in almost every subject, that come under their contemplation."

An important legacy received by Indian Art from its vedic sources of life and literature is the large number of symbols depicted from the earliest times. It includes divinities, ideas and concepts, animals and birds, articles and objects as well as trees and flowers. The most auspicious symbol evolved in Vedic times was the Pūrṇa-Kalaśa. It is said that in each home the artistic form of a woman bearing the full vase was installed. Of all the symbols which became universal for all occasion was the Svastika, a solar symbol.

The Punch-marked coins of silver which have been found all over India, show over five hundred symbols. A study of these symbols, brings to our view a strange world. It depicts the belief of the people. The formost place is given to the solar symbol which is found almost on all the Punch-marked coins of ancient India. Sūrya is represented as a rayed figure with a circle in the centre. Another important symbol is that of a crescent-topped mountain which is associated with the Mauryan dynasty. Amongst other interesting symbols are bull, elephant, lion, horse, wheel, tree in railing, tank with fish, hare, peacock, frog, tortoise, bow and arrow and Svastika etc. An interesting symbol is the trangle-headed standard, which is supposed to be the Indradhvaja. V.S. Agrawala observes, "No doubt is left that the people and the authorities who were issuing the seals and the coins were saturated with a belief in the sacred meaning of these symbols." The story of the symbols as gathered from different sources is a commentary on the visual representation and meaning of Indian Art. About the symbolism of the Sārnāth Lion-capital different suggestions have been put forward. Bloch was of the view that the four animals on the abacus stand for the four gods, Indra, Śiva, Sūrya and perhaps Durgā, whose vāhanas they are. Foucher connected them with four great events of Buddha's life. In the words of V.S. Agrawala, "It may be said at the outset that the Sārnāth capital is the product of a supreme religious symbolism in which each part is a coscious conception in the aggregate. It also appears that this symbolism was the result of an attempt to illustrate Aśoka's own outlook and philosophy of human relationship." He further observes that the Dharma chakra symbolises the policy of Dharma vijaya. The four seated lions represent the majesty and power of the emperor. The four animals represent the divinity in various orders of social organisations.

The auspicious symbols as part of religious thought and ritualistic signs penetrated deep in the Hindū society, and took such strong roots as to have survived though the ages to our own times. They were accepted by Brāhmaṇas, Buddhists and Jainas. They were freely admitted in the decoration of the Stūpa. The ancient symbols naturally entered the iconographic formulas. They assumed a fresh exalted position in association with the different deities. For example Suparṇa became the Garuḍa of Viṣṇu and the Chakra the Dharmachakra of Buddha and Mahāvīra. An analysis of the dispersal and assimilation of these ancient symbols holds the key to the understanding of Indian art forms as they had been handed down from the past. The full meaning of the Indian Art cannot be understood without knowing the individual history of each symbol with which the art of the age is so profusely saturated.

I cannot end this Preface without expressing my gratitude to those who have been my predecessors in the field. It is not possible to count them all, but the footnote will make my debt clear. I would like to name Senart, the founder of the study of Indian symbolism and A.K. Coomarswami who in his Yakṣas revealed for the first time the full importance of Indian symbolism.

Gurukul Kangri University
Hardwar

B.C. SINHA

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Hinduism and its Chief Features

Hinduism

Hindu is a very old word as it is found in the Zendavesta. Persians and the people of western and central Asia used it to denote the inhabitants of an area beyond the river Indus. A.C. Bouquet[1] observes, "The early name for this river was Sindhu, and from the latter word "Hindu" is obviously derived." Hindustan is the Arab name for the whole country. Hence Hinduism is the religion of India, or at least of the greater part of its inhabitants. "Nevertheless, in the Western world, Hinduism stands as the commonly used title of that specific religion, which in India is sharply distinguished from Islam." In the words of Pandit Nehru[2], "Hinduism as a faith is vague, amorphous, many sided, all things to all men. It is hardly possible to define it, or indeed to say precisely whether it is a religion or not, in the usual sense of the word. In its present form, as well as in the past, it embraces many beliefs and practices, from the highest to the lowest, often opposed to or contradicting each other. Its essential spirit seems to be to live and let live."

It is difficult to define Hinduism because of its vagueness and variety. In fact it is not a religion like Christianity and Islam. It is a way of life which tries to attain everything what is good for human life. It is not a static system, but a developing organism, full of movement. One can pack any good thing into Hinduism. Mahatma Gandhi tried to define Hinduism in the following words, "If I were asked, I should simply say : It is the search for truth through non-violent means. A man may not believe in God, and still call himself a Hindū. Hinduism is a relentless pursuit after truth. It is the religion of truth. Truth is God. Denial of God we have known. Denial of truth we have not known." There are critics who say that this attempt to make Hinduism an universal religion is provoked by the spectacle of christian propaganda. It may be a natural desire of an ancient people to represent their religion in no way inferior to that of other lands and to make it inclusive of other religions.

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[1] Hinduism, p. 9.
[2] The Discovery of India, p. 52.

A great European Indologist, Sir Charles Eliot[3], once wrote, "Hinduism has not been made, but has grown. It is a Jungle, not a building. It is a living example of great national paganism such as might have existed in Europe if christianity had not become the state religion of the Roman Empire, if there had remained an incongruous jumble of old local superstitions, Greek philosophy, and oriental cults such as the worship as Sarapis or Mithras." In the words of Monier Williams[4], "Starting from the Veda, Hinduism has ended in embracing something from all religions, and in presenting phases suited to all minds. It is all tolerant, all-compliant, all-comprehensive, all-absorbing."

Swāmi Nikhilananda is of the opinion that incorrect and misleading explanations of Hinduism have been given by non-Hindūs. It is quite difficult for an outsider to enter into the spirit of a religion in which he has not been brought up. The same objection applies to interpretations of Hinduism offered by those, who have no feeling for its teachings. "Contrary to popular views, Hinduism does not repudiate the world, negate social values, or forbids the enjoyment of legitimate pleasures; it points the way to enduring happiness both here and hereafter, and to the highest good as well. The history of India shows that when the country was spiritually great it was also materially prosperous and culturally creative."[5]

Loyalty of Hinduism to certain spiritual concepts has preserved it during many centuries of foreign domination. Such dominations in other countries have destroyed the native culture. There is no exaggeration in saying that the very life of India is centred in religion. It is her mission to the world. One cannot understand India without understanding Hinduism. If India gives up religion, she will be courting disaster. The great religions of the world, as Toynbee has recently said, echoing the time-honoured Hindū belief, are not competitive but complementary.

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[3] Hinduism and Buddhism, vol. I, p. 41.
[4] Hinduism, p. 12.
[5] Swāmi Nikhilananda, Hinduism, p. 14.

It is often said that Hinduism is responsible for much of the injustice and selfishness in Hindū society. But how can we put these blames at the door of the Vedas, Upaniṣads and other religious scriptures which are the main sources of Hinduism. Swāmi Nikhilananda very correctly opines that it is as unreasonable as to make the teachings of Christ responsible for a lack of humanity and consideration for others right apparent in avowedly christian nations. One cannot condemn Hinduism for the present poverty and backwardness of India any more than one can condemn the Sermon on the Mount—with its lofty ideal of forgiveness, non-resistance of evil, and universal love—for the support of war by a militant christian church. The real culprit is men's distortion of their own basic religious concepts. Unfortunately, a certain perversity in human nature co-operates with the present organisation of society to create a gap between ideals and their application.[6]

Chief Features of Hinduism

Hinduism is a faith for knowing and worshipping God. It is the perfection and realisation of the true self. It is the fulfilment of the deepest craving in man. To understand this religion fully well we must study its chief features.

Diversity

It is one of the essential features of Hinduism. Many causes have combined for it. Successive incursions, variety of climate and contact with non-Aryan races have affected the Hindūs variously in different parts of India. What makes Hinduism doubly hard to describe is its variety. In the words of A.C. Bouquet,[7] "Within Hinduism, as within Catholicism, here is almost incredible variety. Heiler once declared that catholicism included and tolerated at least seven distinct kinds of religion within a single institutional framework, and something of the same sort can be said of Hinduism. It is thus possible to find, within its range philosophic mystics who disclaim belief in a personal deity; fervent monotheists who direct their devotions towards a single personal God, of Whom and to Whom they speak in terms resembling those used by many Christians; and at the other extreme, crude animists whose main concern is with some local godling, generally a female tutelary divinity of the village, and polytheists of a type familiar to readers of Greek and Roman literature, closely resembling in scrupulously superstitious character outlined by Theophrastus."

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[6] Swāmi Nikhilananda, pp. 13-14.
[7] Hinduism, p. 11.

According to Cust there are no less than 539 languages and dialects, cultivated and uncultivated, in the whole of India and its bordering regions. Difference of race and language, the divisions and subdivisions of the classes of society crystallized more rapidly in India than in Europe. "Even in districts where the Hindūs are called by one name, and make use of one speech, caste regulations have operated to break them up into an infinite number of independent communities, each priding itself on maintaining its individuality and exclusiveness.

Differences of race, language and social usages have affected Hinduism to a considerable extent. But it is remarkable that with all their diversities, the Hinduism has been preserved in one language and one literature. It is a religion based on an original simple pantheistic doctrine, but branching out into an endless variety. It is like a sacred fig-tree, which from a single stem sends out numerous branches destined to send roots to the ground and become trees themselves. Sir Monier Williams observes,[8] "And it may with truth be asserted that no description of Hinduism can be exhaustive which does not touch on almost every religious and philosophical idea that the world has ever known." Swāmi Nikhilananda[9] rightly observes, "Diversities of ritual and belief, of food and dress, caste and social behaviour, language and politics, have not been able to destroy this deeper spiritual unity."

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8. Hinduism, p. 12.
9. Hinduism, p. 19.

Bhaktism

It is not a less important feature of Hinduism. Bhakti destroys Vāsanas and egoism. It elevates the mind to magnonimous heights. Bhakti is the master-key to open the chambers of wisdom. It culminates in Jnāna as it begins with two and ends in one. Those who fight on the point as to which is superior—Bhakti or Jnāna, are groping in the darkness. In fact the two are one.

Bhāgavadgītā is the earliest exposition of the Bhakti system. In chapter third of this work two paths are indicated, that of devotion to knowledge for the Sāmkhyas and that of devotion to Karma for the Yogins. Everyone is born for a life of activity, but the deeds done do not tie him down to the world, if he does them for worship and not for his private purposes. Janaka obtained perfection by devoting himself to actions alone. But his action was dedicated to the Supreme. He never sought any fruit for himself. The idea of action without attachment is further developed in chapter fourth. Chapter tenth relates that he who knows Him to be the unborn and unbeginning Lord of all worlds, is free from all sins. When the people worship Him with full love, He grants them that condition of mind by means of which they reach Him. Chapter eighteen sums up that the man who worships the Lord with full devotion, attains final success. One should do all acts, intent only upon God, and then one obtains the eternal peace by favour of God. Lord Krisṇa winds up the whole by teaching Arjuna to surrender himself with all his heart to God, who abides in the hearts of all things and moves them. Arjuna is further instructed to dedicate his whole mind to Him, to become his devotee, to worship Him and to bow to Him. In this way he would reach Him. In the words of Sir R.G. Bhandarkar,[10] "This is styled the deepest secret. Then Arjuna is told to set aside all other methods of salvation and surrender himself to Bhagavat alone, and Bhagavat would then free him from all his sins."

The idea of Bhakti, or love of God can be traced back in the Upaniṣads also. In the Upaniṣads, Upasanā of a number of things is prescribed. Such a upasanā cannot but magnify the thing and

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10. Vaiṣṇavism, Śavism and Minor Religious Systems, p. 26.

give it a glorious form, so as to excite admiration and love. In the Bṛhadāraṇyaka Ātman is said to be dearer than a son, wealth and everything else. The doctrine that the individual soul is dependent on the Supreme and that the latter alone works out his salvation, was acknowledged in the times of Upaniṣads. During the period when the Ṛigveda poetry was composed, love for God was often an abiding sentiment in the heart of the poet.[11]

In this manner we see that Bhaktism of the Bhāgavadgītā is to be found in the older religious literature also. Bhaktism made its way into Hindū society in general, but it did not succeed in uprooting the religion of sacrifices.

Catholicity

One of the most attractive thing about Hindū religion is its catholicity. Swāmi Vivekananda was right, when he declared before the Congress of Religions at Chicago in 1893 that the Hindū religion believed not only in universal toleration but also accepted all religions as true. There is no exaggeration that the Hindū mind is all embracing. It accepts everything through a deep understanding of the fundamentals and of the ultimate reality. Hinduism has room for all. It admits the propriety of all points of view and all experience, and their truth and consequent right to exist, so long as they help men to realize the best in their environment, and do not transgress upon the rights of others. "The great hospitableness of the Indian spirit, as it has been called, its readiness to respect the other man's point of view, and to accept it as true, at least so far as the other man is concerned, comes from a cultured man's recognition that truth is a gem of many facets, and that the anxiety to reduce everything to a particular code or law conceived in our human limitations is but a form of blasphemy."[12]

In fact Hinduism is a joint creation of the Āryan and non-Āryan. Elements contributed by all were combined into one single type. In its broadest connotation it would include all that has been achieved in the domain of thought and in the pursuit of good life by the people of ancient India. But it would not be out of place to point out here that the fissiparous tendencies which are never absent from any human institution have taken advantage of the want of absolute cohesion wherever it was marked.

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[11] RV. I, 164, 33.

[12] S.K. Chatterji, Indian Culture, p. 45.

The ideal before Hinduism is a single world-culture. Hindū sages have always been trying to find a path that can be followed by all. The time is ripe for a correct understanding between the different religions of the world. We must take a stand on the fundamentals and not on the accedentals, on the agreements and not on the divergences. The blind egoism which has its roots in ignorance and a desire for domination must be made naked. When this is achieved, a new chapter in the history of humanity will begin.

Professor Northrop aptly ends his works, "The meeting of the East and the West" with the following words, "It should eventually be possible to achieve a society for mankind generally in which the higher standard of living of the most scientifically advanced and theoretically guided Western nations is combined with the compassion, the universal sensitivity to the beautiful, and the abiding equanimity and the calm joy of the spirit which characterize the sages and many of the humblest people in the Orient."

The desire to incorporate the best elements of Hinduism in the evolving world-culture is based not only on the fascination of the Western mind and heart. But this interest is based on the sound judgement of those Western, scholars who have delved deep into the wisdom of India. Max Muller writes, "If I were asked under what sky the human has most fully developed some of its choicest gifts, has most deeply pondered on the greatest problems of life, and has found solutions of some of them which well deserved the attention even of those who have studied Plato and Kant, I should point to India. And if I were to ask myself from what literature we here in Europe—we who have been nurtured almost exclusively on the thought of the Greeks and Romans and of Semetic race, the Jewish—may draw that corrective which is most wanted in order to make of our inner life more perfect, more comprehensive, more universal in fact more truly human, a life not for this life only, but a transfigured and eternal life, again I should point to India."

Longevity

Unlike other religions "development not death" has been the fate of Hinduism. Hinduism has been growing, changing and developing in accordance with the needs of the time. It has never lost its essential spirit. This essential spirit has been the same through the Vedic age to the modern times.

In his famous work "Why Religions Die", Professor J.B. Pratt of America makes a few observations about the Hindū religion, which according to him, is the only religion which tends to survive the present crisis in the life of all religions. Hinduism which he calls the "Vedic way" is a "self-perpetuating religion." The Vedic way......the way of constant spiritual reinterpretation ......leads of life—life which is self-perpetuating, self-renewing, and which for the individual and for the world may be eternal". In the words of Professor Pratt,[13] "If a religion is to live it must adapt itself to new and changing conditions, if it is to feed the spiritual life of its children, it must have the sensitivity and inventiveness that shall enable it to modify their diet as their needs demand." Another secret of the longevity of Hindū religion, as pointed out by Pratt is its Catholicity. He says, "Mutually contradictory creeds can and do keep house together without quarrel within the wide and hospitable Hindū family." Hindū thought because of its ingrained conclusiveness and its tolerance stressed the essential unity of all religions. Tolerance in Hinduism is another basic factor for its longevity. According to Yogavaśiṣṭha,[14] "All the diverse doctrines and paths originating at different times and in different countries, however, lead ultimately to the same Supreme Truth like the many different leading travellers from different places to the same city. It is ignorance of the Absolute Truth and misunderstanding of the different doctrines that cause their followers to quarrel in bitter animosity with one another. They consider their own particular dogmas and path to be the best, as every traveller may think, though wrongly, his own path to be the only and the best path." The Yogavaśiṣṭha again says, "The method by which a man makes spiritual progress is the best for him. He would not change it for another, which may not look right to him, nor please him, nor be useful to him."

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[13] Why Religions Die, p. 122.

[14] Yogavaśiṣṭha, V. III, pp. 96, 51, 52, 53.

The tolerance of Hindū religion has become a philosophy, We call it by the name of Anekāntavāda. According to this philosophy the reality has many aspects and every thinker views it from one or the other aspect. A doctrine of many sidedness of reality is found in Syādvāda, which means the use of caution in making judgements. In this connection we must remember that our judgements are partial truths only. Pratt rightly observes, "The tendency of Hinduism to absorb its children and the urge felt by its rebelling children to fall back into family fold has been illustrated many times in Indian History. The process is going on to-day." Hindū religion has grown vigorous by absorving all that was best in other religions which came in its contact. In the words of S.K. Chatterji,[15] "In ancient times there was much give and take between the Greeks and the Indians. Within the first century of the birth of Christianity India welcomed it and absorbed its best elements into its own culture. In medieval times it made its own all that was best in Islamic culture, although Islam came to India as a very hostile creed. And now in modern times, slowly and gradually Indian culture is absorbing all that is best in the scientific civilization of the West, without losing any of its vital elements."

Spirituality

Modern science cannot give us knowledge of the real nature of man and of the deeper aspects of nature. It avoids all references to soul, mind and consciousness. It is living on the surface of life and is building a civilization which is concerned more with the husk than with the grain of life. Alexis Carrol an eminent scientist, deplores this state of things and suggests that the only possible remedy for this evil is much more profound knowledge of ourselves. Hinduism aims at a deeper knowledge of Man and the Universe. It is a glorious attempt to live a spiritual life. Indian seers discovered that man was a microcosm in which the whole Macrocosm is represented.

The Upaniṣads proclaim that the "self is the Absolute Reality." The most common word for the Absolute in India is Brahman. When the man realizes this Absolute, then there is no delusion or grief for him. In the words of Sri Aurbindo, "The one existence to whom sages gave different names of the Veda, the one without a second of the Upaniṣads, is the fundamental seeing of Indian spirituality – this is the first idea of the religious mind of India." Indian spirituality has been positive and integral. It visioned God in all, animate or inanimate. It emphasized physical, mental and material perfection because in these also we had to manifest the best, the divine in us. Nothing could escape the intutive vision of the Hindū seers. Matter, life, mind and world were analysed, dissected and studied. Our relations with God were put into proper perspective.

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[15] **Indian Culture, p. 6.**

Theory of Karma and Rebirth

As one sows, so he reaps. This is in essence the theory of Karma and rebirth. Physical world is shut off from the dead by destroying the physical body. It opens a finer subtle world. This world is superior to our physical world in many respects. A very simple question arises at this stage as to why do we come back to the physical world when the spiritual world is superior to it. The answer is that we have incurred here many debts that we have to pay off. We have to undergo the consequences of the deeds done in our previous life. No one can escape the Law of Karma. According to Mahābhārata, "Even the gods have to undergo the good and evil consequences of their acts." Yogavaśiṣṭha says, "There is no place in the universe – no mountain, no sky, no ocean, no heaven, in the universe – where one does not undergo the good or evil consequences of the deeds done by one".

A Hindū very well knows that the Law of Karma operates in the world, but it is very difficult for others to grasp it. A Hindū holds that the cosmic order is divine and therefore just and properly maintained. If a person does not meet the consequences of his deeds in this life, he must do so in some other life. "There would be chaos and rule of injustice in the universe if one were to cease to exist without having undergone the consequences of his deeds. Death, being a common experience of every living being at some time, cannot be considered a punishment for any dead. Life here must presuppose a previous life to account for the inequalities of circumstances and life." Rebirth is not only a fact known directly to the seers but also a logical necessity. Kant regarded the continuity of life after death as a postulate or moral consciousness. Some of the Western thinkers who have pondered over the problems of life have appreciated the theory of Karma and rebirth.

The caste system

The division of society into four major heads is a unique feature of Hinduism. Its origin is traced back to the period of the Ṛigveda. In the Puruṣaśūkta, the four castes; Brāhmaṇa, Rājanya, Vaiśya and Śūdra are mentioned. But Professor A.B. Keith holds,[16] "But this hymen is admittedly late and can prove nothing for the state of affairs prevailing when the bulk of the Ṛigveda was composed. On the other hand, as we have seen, the distinction between the Āryan colour and that of the aborigines is essential and forms a basis of caste." Whatever may be the origin of the caste system, the fact cannot be denied that this system is a special feature of Hinduism.

A Great American thinker Gerald Heard[17] is of the view that these four classes are distinguished by unmistakable psychological characteristics which suit them to their particular purpose, function and place. It is this organization that made Indian society stable, efficient and strong. It produced in India great scholars, warriors, administrators, and producers of wealth. According to a Western writer P.D. Ouspensky[18], "All the most brilliant period of history, without exception, were periods in which the social order approached the caste system." He thinks that caste system is a natural division of society. Whether people wish it or not, whether they recognize it or not, they are divided into four castes. They are Brāhmaṇas, Kshatriyas, Vaiśyas and Śūdras. "No human legislation, no philosophic intricacies, no pseudo-sciences and no forms of terror can abolish this fact. And the normal functioning and development of human societies are possible only if this fact is recognized and acted on."

The four Āśramas

Equally important was the planning of an individual life in four orders called Āśramas. "This planning was based on a psychological study of the interest, needs, capacities, characteristics and social adjustment of an individual at different stages of life from childhood to old age."

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[16] The Cambridge History of India, Vol. I, p. 82.
[17] Man, the Master, p. 129.
[18] A New Model of the Universe, p. 447.

These four orders are : Brahmcharya, Gṛhastha, Vānaprastha and Sanyāsa. A person might choose the first and devote his whole life to study. He had to live at his teacher's house until his death, and follow the course of strict discipline prescribed for a student.

If one chose the second, he had to return from his teacher's house, after his study was over. After the marriage he had to maintain his family. His chief duty was to study the Vedas, maintain a fire, and perform the different rites and ceremonies.

The third Āśrama is called Vānaprastha in which an individual retires from the life of householder and along with his life companion devotes himself to the service of the society. He has to live without pleasures. Most of the great works on philosophy, ethics and science have been written by such people who made a proper use of this period of life.

The fourth Āśrama is called Sanyāsa in which the individual should give up all worldly pursuits and should devote himself to meditation and Yoga. A Sanyāsi was to live in a forest. In this stage he may dictate books, teach those who approach him for guidance. According to Hindū culture old age should not be a miserable age. It should be most happy and peaceful. The Hindūs have a strong faith that life does not end in death. Death only opens a gate to another life. The last stage of life is to be devoted to the preparation for the next one. Death is a welcome change in which the old and worn out body is to be replaced by a new one.

The cow-protection

Any narrative on Hinduism would be incomplete unless it includes a note on cow-protection. The attachment of sanctity to horned domestic cattle is found in many parts of the world. But at no place it can be compared to the cow-worship in India. Bull was a sacred animal in the proto-Dravidian culture of the Indus Valley. The curious reverence for cow, and the sanctity accorded to the Śaivite bull in modern India is therefore of very ancient origin. A.C. Bouquet[19] observes, "It is a special case of general attitude towards non-human organic life which prevails in India and which is well expressed in the words of Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad : "The Ātman in man is very same as the vital force in the elephant, the gnat, the ant, the four quarters of the world, in short, the Ātman in man is part and parcel of the whole universe."

Monier Williams relates the superb attitude of Hindūs towards the cow in the following words, "The cow is of all animals the most sacred. Every part of its body is inhabited by some deity or other. Every hair on its body is inviolable. All its excreta are hallowed. Not a particle ought to be thrown as impure. On the contrary, the water it ejects ought to be preserved as the best of holy waters—a sin destroying liquid which sanctifies everything it touches, while nothing purifies like cow-dung. Any spot which a cow has condescended to honour with the sacred deposit of her excrement is for ever afterwards consecrated ground, and the filthiest place plastered with it is at once cleansed and freed from pollution, while the ashes produced by burning this hallowed substance are of such a holy nature that they not only make clean all material things, however, previously unclean, but have only to be sprinkled over a sinner to convert him into a saint."

Mahatma Gandhi, writing in Young India, 1931, made the following remarks :

"Cow-protection is an article of faith in India. Apart from its religious sanctity it is an ennobling creed."

"Cow protection is the dearest possession of a Hindū heart. It is the one concrete belief common to all Hindūs. No one who does not believe in cow-protection can possibly be a Hindū."

"That which distinguishes Hinduism from every other religion is its cow protection."

"Cow-protection is one of the most wonderful phenomena in human evolution."

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[19] Hinduism, p. 154.

"Cow-protection is the gift of Hinduism to the world."

The difference between Indian and Western ways of regarding man's relation to the animal world is nowhere better illustrated than in one of the stories of the Panchatantra, where a king Śivi is asked to arbitrate between a falcon and a dove. The king offers the falcon some dead meat if he will spare the dove. But the falcon insists that if you deprive me of my living dove, you ought to give me a proper alternative. Thereupon the king agrees to give the weight of the dove in his own flesh. He cuts off pieces of his own flesh and throws them in the scales, but they are not found equal to the weight of the dove. Then the king leaps with his whole body into the pan. At the sight of such self-sacrifice Indra and Yama appeared before him and exclaimed, "Well done, O King, we have realized your burning love for the animals. You alone have known the real truth. Your body will again be whole and unhurt as before. May your inexhaustible wealth be always spend in acts of virtue benefiting all created beings."

To quote Swāmi Śivananda ji,[20] "Hinduism is extremely catholic, liberal, tolerant and elastic. This is the wonderful feature of Hinduism. A foreigner is struck with astonishment when he hears about the diverse sects and the creeds of Hinduism. But these varieties are really an ornament to Hinduism."

Religious consciousness among Hindūs

Man became conscious of some power beyond his understanding almost at the dawn of civilization. Hindūs were probably the first to get some idea about it. This consciousness which is termed as religious has intensely affected the minds of men in every part of this universe.

The cosmology and cosmography which the Hindūs believe in is a complicated affair. It is not possible to go into the details of the subject here in this brief chapter. But it would be proper to quote Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad which tells that there was only the self in the form of a person. When he wanted a companion, with one-half of himself he produced a woman, who became his wife. The husband and wife together produced human beings. Then the 'self' rubbed his palm of the hand on the inside of his mouth and produced fire. Moisture and Soma were produced from his semen. The 'self' created gods, who are immortal. The Veda Mantras are praises offered to Devas, who are regarded as capable of bestowing any blessings on man. But it does not mean that the poets of the Saṁhitās were ignorant of the existence of the Supreme Being. The trend of visualising the manifold as expressions of the one, and the one as revealing itself in the many is clearly seen in the hymns of the Rigveda. In the Puruṣa Śūkta we have the most magnificent description of the spiritual unity of the cosmos.

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[20] **All About Hinduism, p. 179.**

The Puruṣa is all. The whole universe is a small fraction of Him. In fact the Puruṣa Śūkta proclaims once for all, the organic inseparability of the constituents of society. The Vedic seer loved mankind as much as he loved god. In Rigveda we get the earliest complete presentation of the nature of Reality as both immanent and transcendent. The Vedas may be regarded as the source to which the later developments of religious and philosophic thought can be traced. The bold speculative trend and the philosophic flights of the Vedas culminated in the Upaniṣads.

The Upaniṣads do not reject the authority of the Brāhmaṇas but they regard it as a spiritual exercise only. The thirst for knowledge could not be quenched by external ceremonies. It is necessary to find an answer to the question of the creation of the universe and one's relation to it. So the various theories about the creation of universe have been advanced in the Upaniṣads. This scheme of creation is developed into a further detail in the epics and the Purāṇas.

The Upaniṣads hold that this universe is in essence a spiritual unity. All this is pervaded by the Lord. The Supreme Being can neither be seen, nor heard, nor thought, nor understood with the faculties of the individual. He can be recognized only when the ego is abolished.

It is often thought by some scholars that there is a note of pessimism in the Upaniṣads and this cannot be regarded as a healthy trend of life. But this change is far from the truth. The life of the sages of the Upaniṣads was full with joy of the recognition of divinity and sacredness in the world. In fact the

Upaniṣads laid the foundation of Hinduism. In the words of Swāmi Krishnananda, "The Upaniṣads, thus, constitute the zenith of human thinking, a height it never reached either before or after and are the glory and treasure of the culture, not only of India, but of the world."

The Purāṇas contain history, mythology and discourses in religion. The gods, saints, kings and other characters described in the Purāṇas have a rare educative value to the human mind. In fact they are an efficient mouthpiece of the Vedas and Upaniṣads.

Rāmāyaṇa and Mahābhārata are the two great epics of India. While the Vedas and the Upaniṣads called forth special qualifications, the Purāṇas and the epics came to the rescue of the general man. It need not be emphasised here, if the religion of the Hindūs had exhausted in the Vedas and the Upaniṣads, Hinduism had died out long ago. The two epics, to a very great extent are the real builders of the popular Hindū religion and their names will be remembered as long as Hinduism lasts. It is the Rāmāyaṇa and Mahābhārata that have filled the minds of Indian people with the idea of a compassionate and all powerful God ruling the destinies of man. He helps them who craves for His grace. In such a short narrative it is not possible to estimate the impact of the thoughts of Vālmiki and Vyāsa on the Hindū society. But we can safely conclude that the religion that common Hindū practises is the religion of the Purāṇas and the epics. In the words of the Mahābhārata "Whatever is here, whether concerning ethics, politics, human well-being or spiritual salvation is elsewhere; what is not found here will not be found anywhere else."

The essence of Mahābhārata is contained in the famous Bhāgavadgītā The problem of Arjuna is the problem of mankind and the answer of Lord Krișṇa is the gospel of God to humanity. Lord Krișṇa declares that the soul is immortal, so it is futile to be sorry over the death of what connot die. The birth and death of the soul is like the changing of one's clothes. The song of the Lord in fact declares that the ultimate reality is God, who is Absolute. The Absolute is regarded as the support of the universe. There is no place where God is not and no object in which He is not present. He can be approached in any way suited to one's capacity. The religion of the Gītā possesses an universal appeal. It is not a cult or creed of any particular faith, but lays down rules for systematic discipline. No aspect of existence is out of the scope of the teaching of Gītā.

Now we come to Smṛitis, which are supposed to be an elaboration of the Vedas. They are the principal codes of social law. Among Smṛitis, those of Manu, Yājnavalka and Pārāśara are the most authoritative. The Smṛitis supplement and explain the sociological and ritualistic injunctions of the Vedas. In fact they can be regarded as a general guide-book to social living under different circumstances and in different times. Manu clearly declares that the Dharma is to be known through the Vedas, Smṛitis, conduct of saints and finally one's own purified conscience.

The above narrative indicates that the contemplation of the Absolute is the highest form any religion can take. The Hindūs are pioneers in this field. In the Ṛigvedic age, the Āryans who with the local residents were later to be known as Hindūs worshipped many deities. But polytheism could not be the correct description of the religions consciousness exhibited in the Ṛigveda. The Āryans were well inclined to accept the Supreme Being. The standard number of gods mentioned in the Ṛigveda is thirty-three. But in present day theology of the Hindūs mainly centres round Brahmā, Viṣṇu, Śiva and Śaktis. Besides the chief deities almost every village in India has a grama-Devatā. And apart from these the ancient cities of India have their own guardian deities. One important element in the religious consciousness of the Hindūs, is that all the three Supreme Gods have their consorts. It is an important point to note that the Indian people early in their religious history arrived at the view that there was one Supreme God and the man was born out of His sacrifice. A.A. Macdonell observes; "In the whole hymn RV, X.58, the soul of one who is lying apparently dead is besought to return from the distance where it is wandering."

It is quite relevant to add here a few words about the goal of Hindū religious living. Kant the great philosopher holds that the redemption is the Supreme concern of all religions and morality. And the struggle against evil waged by man is the root of all religion. G S. Ghurye partially agrees with this view. He observes, "In the light of history and development of religious consciousness among the Hindūs. I think it is correct to speak of redemption, of course, with a sense and content which is not identical with those of other religions as its goal; but it would be wrong to say that morality or struggle against evil is its source." It is true that morality is only one aspect of religious living whereas the redemption is the end of Hindū religious consciousness.

2

Philosophy of the Hindus

We must understand that the Indian authorities separate the Veda into two divisions. The first is called Karma-kāṇḍa and the second is called Jnāna-kaṇḍa. Jnāna-kaṇḍa is taught in the Upaniṣads and is for the select few who are capable of understanding the true doctrine. The six Darśanas grew directly out of the Upaniṣads. The names of the six schools are as following.

The Nyāya

Gotama is its acknowledged author. This school furnishes a philosophical arrangement, with strict rules of reasoning. This system was intended to furnish a correct method of philosophical inquiry into all the objects and subjects of human knowledge. The text of Gotama is a collection of Sūtras in five books, each divided into sections, termed Prakarṇas, as relating to distinct topics.

The word Nyāya signifies "going into a subject analytically." In this sense of 'analysis' the word Nyāya is exactly opposed to Sānkhya. The Nyāya propounds in its first Sūtra sixteen topics, the first of which is Pramāṇa. The different processes by which the mind arrives at true knowledge are four : Pratyaksha, Anumāna, Upamāna, Śabda. "The treatment of the second of these four inferences,' indicates that the Hindūs have not, like other nations, borrowed their logic from the Greeks."[1] It is divided into five Avayavas : Pratijnā, Hetu, Udāharaṇa, Upanaya, and Nigamana. This method of splitting argument into five divisions is thus illustrated : 1. The hill is fiery; 2. for it smokes;

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1. M. Williams, Hindūism, p. 188.

3. Whatever smokes is fiery, as a kitchen hearth; 4. this hill smokes; 5. therefore this hill is fiery.

The second topic of Nyāya is Prameya, or the subjects about which right knowledge is to be obtained. These are twelve : 1. Soul, 2. Body, 3. Senses, 4. Objects of sense, 5. Understanding, 6. Mind, 7. Activity, 8. Faults, 9. Transmigration, 10. Consequences, 11. Pain, 12. Emancipation.

With regard to the fourteen other topics, they seem to be not so much philosophical categories. But they certainly illustrate very curiously the captions propensities of a Hindū disputant, leading him to be quick in repartee, and ready with specious objections to the most conclusive argument.

After enumerating the sixteen topics, Gotama proceeds to show how false notions are at the root of all misery. The fault of liking and disliking comes from a false notion. From the fault proceeds activity and from this mistaken activity proceeds involving either merit or demerit. This merit and demerit forces a man to pass through repeated births for the sake of its reward and punishment. From these births proceeds misery, and it is the aim of philosophy to correct the false notions at the root of this misery.[2]

The Vaiśeṣika

It is attributed to a sage Kaṇāda. There is a view that it may be called a supplement of the Nyāya. Of course it is not so much a branch of Nyāya as a development of it, extending the system to physical investigations. According to Monier Williams "It is perhaps the most interesting of all the systems, both from its more practical character and from the parallels it offers to European philosophical ideas."

The Vaiśeṣika starts by arranging its inquiries under seven Padārthas. They are as follows : 1. Dravya, 2. Guṇa, 3. Karman, 4. Sāmānya, 5. Viśeṣa, 6. Samavāya, 7. Abhāva. Kaṇāda however enumerated only six Padārthas. The seventh was added by later writers. The Padārthas are more properly categories than the topics of the Nyāya. These seven categories

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2. M. Williams, Hindūism, p. 190.

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have their sub-divisions. The first category has : earth, water, light, air, ether, time, space, soul, and the mind. As to the second category there are seventeen qualities inherent in the nine substances. They are colour, savour, odour, tangibility, numbers, extensions, individuality, conjunction, disjunction, priority, posteriority, intellections, pleasure, pain, desire, aversion and volitions. Seven qualities are implied. They are gravity, fluidity, viscidity, self-reproduction, merit, demerit and sound. Sixteen of these qualities belong to material substances. The other eight : intellection, volition, desire, aversion, pleasure, pain, merit and demerit are the properties of the soul.

The third category, Karman, consists of five kinds of acts; elevation, depression, contraction, dialation and motion. The fourth category has two sub-divisions; higher and lower properties. The Viśeṣa, belongs to the nine eternal substances of the first category, all of which have eternal ultimate difference.

The sixth category, Samavāya is of only one kind. It is the coinherence between a substance and its qualities, between atoms and what is formed out of them, between a species and its individual, between any object and the general idea connected with it, and is thought to be a real entity.

In the seventh category of Abhāva, four kinds are specified; antecedent non-existence, cessation of existence, mutual non-existence, and absolute non-existence.

In the Vaiśeṣika system of philosophy the formation of the world is supposed to be effected by the aggregations of atoms. An atom is defined, as 'something existing, having no cause and eternal.' It is invisible, intangible, indivisible, imperceptible by the senses and each atom has a viśeṣa or eternal essence of its own. The name Īśvara is introduced once into Gotam's Sūtras, but is not found in Kaṇāda's. The belief of both was that the formation of the world was simply the result of Adṛṣṭa. This force in Hindū philosophy becomes a kind of god, if not the only god. Later Naiyāyika writers, affirm the existence of a supreme soul, distinct from the human soul. This supreme soul is eternal, immutable, omniscient, without form, all pervading, all powerful and framer of the universe.

It is clear that the Vaiśeṣika cosmogony is dualistic because it assumes the existence, of eternal atoms along with eternal Soul. It is opposed to any theory which would make an evil world spring from pure and perfect spirit. It does not decide positively the precise relation between soul and matter. In the words of De La Saussaya,[3] "Kaṇāda accepts an atomistic view of the origin of the natural world. This philosophy also, although mostly concerned with logical questions, is entirely dominated by the belief in transmigration and the struggle for freedom, though without producing anything original on the subject."

The Sānkhya

The philosophy of Sānkhyais associated with a sage named Kapila. This system is more categorically dualistic. It wholly rejects the notion that impure matter can originate from pure spirit and denies that anything can be produced out of nothing.

The Sānkhya philosophy derives its name from the exact calculation and summing up of its fundamental principles, of which it accepts no less than twenty-five. Perception, syllogism, and a right affirmation, are the three means by which the knowledge of truth can be attained. By attaining this knowledge various forms of suffering can be removed. In the Sānkhya, instead of an analytical inquiry into the universe, we have a synthetical system starting from an original Tattva, called Prakṛti, which evolves, produces and brings forth everything else.

We must remember that Prakṛti is made up of three Guṇas; Sattva, Rajas and Tamas. These three Guṇas are the actual substances of which Prakṛti is constituted, just as trees are of a forest. This remarkable doctrine of three eternal principles, Sattva, Rajas and Tamas may be called Sānkhya trinity. The Sānkhya-Kārikā says, "The root and substance of all things (except soul) is Prakṛti. It is no production. Seven things produced by it are also producers. Thence come sixteen productions (Vikāra). Soul, the twenty-fifth essence is neither a production nor producer."

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[3] Manual of the Science of Religion, p. 547.

According to Monier Williams,[4] "It appears, too, that all Prakṛtis performances are solely for the benefit of soul, who receives her favours ungratefully. Indeed the object of the Sānkhya system is to effect the liberation of Puruṣa or soul from the fetters which bind it, in consequence of its union with Prakṛti." A most illiterate Hiudū is able to understand and adopt the idea of a universe proceeding from Prakṛti and Puruṣa as from father and mother. It is noteworthy that Buddhism has more in common with the Sānkhya philosophy than with any of the other systems. Even the cosmogony of Manu, presents a process of evolution very similar to that of Sānkhya. In the Purāṇas and Tantras Prakṛti becomes a real mother of the universe. There is a common saying in India; "No knowledge equal to the Sānkhya, no power equal to the Yoga." In the words of H.T. Cole-brooke,[5] "The professed design of all the schools of Sānkhya, theistical, atheistical, and mythological, as of other Indian systems of philosophy, is to teach the means by which eternal beautitude may be attained after death, if not before it."

The Yoga

This school of philosophy is supposed to be founded by Patañjali. The fundamental lines of the system of the Yoga coincide with those of Sānkhya. It differs from it, first by recognition of one God or a Supreme Soul, as being distinguished from the individual souls.

The aim of the Yoga is to teach means by which the human soul may attain complete union with the Universal Soul. The fusion of the individual spirit with the Supreme Soul, may be effected even in the body by constant habit of keeping the mind in its unmodified state. In this state complete suppression of the passions has to be obtained. The suppression of all actions can be achieved by meditation on the Supreme Being. The repitition of Om is supposed to be all-efficacious in giving knowledge of the Supreme and preventing the obstacles to Yoga. The eight means of mental concentration are as follows :

1. Yama (restraint)
2. Niyama (religious observances)

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[4] Hindūism, p. 197.

[5] The Religion and Philosophy of Hindūs, p. 149.

3. Āsana (postures)
4. Prāṇāyāma (breathing in a peculiar way)
5. Pratyahara (restraint of the senses)
6. Ḍhāraṇa (steadying of the mind)
7. Dhyāna (contemplation)
8. Samādhi (profound meditation)

The Upaniṣads regard the senses which are extrovert as obstructions to spiritual experiences. These senses have to be subdued and turned inward for the purpose of Yoga. Yoga is all round self-control, and this state does not last long, for it comes and goes, and hence the student has to be very careful. The Yoga system appears to be a contrivance for concentrating the mind with the utmost intensity. The professed object of the austerities of Śaivites is to effect union with the Supreme Being.

The Mīmānsā

This Jaimini's system of philosophy is styled as Pūrva-mīmānsā also. In fact the Mīmānsā is not a branch of any philosophical system. It is rather a system of Vedic interpretation. "Its aim is to solve the doubts and discrepancies in regard to Vedic texts, caused by the discordant explanations of opposite schools; and its only claim to the title of a philosophy consists in its mode of interpretation."

This system is mostly concerned with the inculcation of the Vedas and even with their practical contents. It points the way to the performance of duties, and shows the blessed results that follow. Acts of virtue and happiness as a reward, which other schools consider of less value, are here most highly prized. In the words of De La Saussaye, "Of course this school is more especially occupied with objects which the others more or less neglect, with the defence of the Vedas and the results of properly performed sacrificial rites."

Jaimini was an opponent of both rationalism and theism. The tendency of his teaching was to allow no voice to either reason or God. The Veda was practically the only God. A Supreme Being might exist, but was not necessary to the system. Jaimini said that Veda is itself authority and has no need of an authorizer. The sole aim of Mīmānsā is to know Dharma, which consists in the performance of the rites and sacrifices prescribed by the Veda. Dharma is itself the bestower of reward. Some recent Mīmānsakas, however, maintain that Dharma ought to be performed as an offering to a Supreme Being, and that it is to be so performed as a means of emancipation. Amongest the teachers of this school, the most prominent was Kumārila Bhaṭṭa, who about the seventh century A.D. worked in opposition to the Buddhists.

H.T. Colebrooke observes,[6] "It is not directly a system of philosophy; not chiefly so. But, in course of delivering canons of scriptural interpretation, it incidentally touches upon philosophical topics; and scholastic disputants have elicited from its dogmas principles of reasoning applicable to the prevailing points of controversy agitated by the Hindū schools of philosophy."

The Vedānta

Vyāsa or Bādrāyaṇa is supposed to be the founder of this school of philosophy. Vedānta literally signifies "conclusion of the Veda", and bears reference to the Upaniṣads, which are terminating section of the Vedas to which they belong. Its teachings were fully developed in the commentaries of the great teacher 'Śankarāchārya', who flourished about the end of 7th or beginning of the 8th century of our era. He was a great reviver of Hinduism, in opposition to unorthodox Buddhism.

As the Nyāya has much is common with the practical philosophy of Aristotle, so the Vedānta offers many parallels to the idealism of Plato. The essence of Vedānta lies in the well-known formula of three words from Chhāndogya Upaniṣad; "Ekam evādvitiyam." It asserts, "Brahma exists truly, the world falsely, the soul is only Brahma, and no other." "All this universe indeed is Brahma; from him does it proceed; into him is it dissolved; in him it breathes. So let everyone adore him calmly." So the Vedānta is on the one hand opposed to Nyāya and on the other hand to the pluralistic Sānkhya. In the Nyāya the origin of the world proceeded from a concurrence of eternal atoms and in the Sānkhya from Prakṛti.

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[6] The Religion and Philosophy of Hindūs, p. 189.

In the Vedānta there is no individual soul as distinct from the universal Soul. Hence the doctrine of this school is called Advaita. Bādrāyaṇa's first Sūtra tells the object of the whole system in one word and that is Brahma-Jijnāsā. In the second Sūtra this Brahma is defined to mean, "that from which the production of this universe results." It is both creator and creation. It is itself Existence, Knowledge and Joy.

The creed of the Vedāntist does not necessarily imply that the world is all Māyā. Vedānta affirms that Brahma alone is real but allows a practical existence to souls, the world, and Īśvara. They are created by Māyā or False Knowledge. By reason of Avidyā, the living soul of every individual, mistakes the world and its own body and mind for realities, just as a rope in a dark night may be mistaken for a snake. The moment the personal soul is free from the self-imposed ignorance through the Vedānta philosophy, all the false knowledge vanishes. For those who are truly free there is no return, they have found rest from the whirlpool of life and constantly renewed existence.

According to Monier Williams[7] if the Vedānta theory is pushed to its ultimate consequences, it will lead to the neglect of all duties, religious and moral, of all activity, physical and intellectual, and of all self-culture.

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[7] **Hindūism, p. 206.**

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Important Hindu Sects

Śaivism and Vaiṣṇavism are the two great sects which determine the history of Hinduism. In fact thy constitute the life and soul of Hindūism. It should be clearly understood that Śaivism and Vaiṣṇavism are not basically opposite creeds. They represent different lines of religious thought. Monier Williams[1] observes, "Śaivas and Vaiṣṇavas do in fact acquiesce to a certain extent in each other's view, but each lays an exaggerated stress on a particular doctrine and these differences eventually led to a temporary antagonism."

Even today Śaivas and Vaiṣṇavas like to maintain their distinct characteristics, which they exhibit by the sectarian mark on their foreheads. The mark of the Vaiṣṇavas being two perpendicular strokes meeting below in a curve, which is a symbol of the foot-print of Viṣṇu, while that of the Śaivas consists of three horizontal lines, made with white or grey ashes. The Vaiṣṇava mark is called Ūrdhvapuṇḍra, the Śaiva is called Tri-puṇḍra. In the words of De La Saussaye,[2] "Their origin is hidden from us, but is probably to be sought for in the popular religion of ancient times, which is concealed by Brāhmanism having pushed itself to the fire."

In the fourth century B.C. Megasthenes found the worship of Dionysos and Herakles widely spread in the north of India. In the former we recognize Śiva and in the later Kriṣṇa, whose worship became united with that of Viṣṇu. The most famous Brāhmanic teachers took part in the rites of Śiva and Viṣṇu, although the philosophy of the sectarian teachers now and then follows its own way, yet it always remains under the influence of

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1. Hindūism, p. 97.
2. Manual of the Science of Religion, p. 639.

the Brāhmanic schools. "Brahmanism has both maintained and strengthened itself by receiving sectarian religions within its pale." This union manifests itself in the doctrine of the Triad, in which the one Absolute is revealed : as Brahmā the creator, Viṣṇu the supporter, and Śiva the destroyer. The doctrine of Trimurti is important as a proof of the eagerness for a bond of union embracing the different religions. It is an important point to note here that Brahmā was always in the background as an object of worship. The Śaivas regarded Śiva and the Vaiṣṇavas regarded Viṣṇu as the highest, whose rivals were in each case represented as subordinate. In due course of time we see that both are appealed to as equal. Viṣṇu-Śiva combined in this way are called Hari-Hara and this worship is still quite popular.

Śaivisn

Śiva the supreme God of the Śaivas, traces his ancestry to the pregnant womb of the ancient culture. To quote Sir John Marshall,[3] "Among the many revelations that Mohenjo-daro and Harappā have had in store for us, none perhaps, is more remarkable than the discovery that Śaivism has a history going back to the chalcolithic age or perhaps even further still, and that it takes its place as the most ancient living faith in the world." There is a view that Śiva is the God of the Dravidians. The special feature of Śaivism from its very inception was the worship and meditation of the creative cosmic principle. The image of Śivalinga, found almost in all the Śaiva temples throughout India, is only a plastic representation of self-existent truth.

The origin of Śaivism is lost in obscurity. But it is clear that the historical Śaivism is a blend of two lines of development, the Āryan and the pre-Āryan. In the words of K.A. Nilakantha Sastri,[4] "It is not a single cult, but a federation of allied cults, whose practices range from the serenest form of personal life in faith to the most repulsive excesses that alienate one's sympathy for the cult. The hold of Śaivism extends not only over the whole of India, from the Indus valley to Bengal, but stretches out across the sea to Greater India and the Archipelago, and beyond the northern mountains to central Asia."

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3. Mohenjo-daro and the Indus Civilization, Preface, p. vii.
4. The Cultural Heritage of India, p. 63.

"The characteristics of Śaivism are the exaltation of Śiva above all other gods, the highly concrete conception of the deity, and the intensely personal nature of the relation between him and his devotees." These traits are most clearly found in Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad. Just as the Gitā voices the intense theism of Vaiṣṇavism, so does the Śvetāśvatara expound the supremacy of Śiva. On the one hand, Śiva is here identified with the eternal Absolute, on the other hand he is the God of all gods, potent for good and evil. Soon he came to be regarded as the creator of the world, its instructor and redeemer. To quote Mulk Raj Anand [5] "The human soul attains pure bliss by uniting with him and through gradual renunciation of the world, exercising Bhakti and by seeing everything in Him."

Śaivism is more deeply rooted in Vedic literature than Vaiṣṇavism, In fact Śiva is the heir of Rudra, whom we find in connection with the Māruts. This Rudra is celebrated in a hymn in Yajurveda. Here he appears as a being who lives on the mountains with his followers, and whose protection is sought for house and farm, and for all sorts of business. He is not the god of a sacerdotal religion, but a lord who reveals himself to herdsmen and water-bearers. His two sides are here clearly marked. He is a saviour, who gives pleasure and turns away sorrow. He is a destroyer, who is justly feared. Rudra in Ṛigveda is a terrible god, and much supplication was needed to humour him into a good temper.[6] There is none more powerful than the Rudra. The Ṛigvedic Rudra exhibits more of the traits of the Rudra-Śiva of later times. In the Yajurveda, we meet with stories concerning Rudra's exploits, such as killing the Asuras and destroying their cities. But it is the Śatarudrīya which draws together all the floating conceptions regarding Rudra-Śiva of the early Vedic times and provides a fresh starting point for new developments.

Let us now consider Śiva as a popular god. He does not reveal himself in such Avatāras as Viṣṇu, yet he is livingly present to his worshippers in various forms. The form of Śiva is terrible. He dwells on the Kailāśa with his wife Pārvati and numerous Gaṇas. His power threatens people with various dangers. He has three eyes, serpent round his body and skulls round his neck. He represents the annihilating power of nature.

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[5] The Hindū View of Art, p. 48.

[6] Macdonnel, Vedic Mythology, p. 77.

Śaivism agrees closely with Sāṅkhya in its dogmatics and with the Yoga in its practical discipline. Haribhadra, an early Jaina writer tells us that the followers of Gautama and Kaṇāda were Śaivas. "But the affiliation of Śaivism with these systems of thought and discipline was apparently no more than a passing phase, for the tendency of Śaivism, in its later history, was to develop along peculiar lines of its own."[7] There are several passages in Mahābhārata which verify the spread of Śaivism and its increasing hold on society. Kṛṣṇa himself figures as the chief devotee of Śiva.

The most spread symbol of Śiva is the Linga, of which millions exist in India, as erected stones, sanctuaries, or as amulets for private use. Although the worship of Śiva is popular throughout the whole country, no temples being so common as those which enshrine his symbol; the lingam. It has often been maintained that the worship of Śiva, dates from a Dravidian people. Lingaites in Southern India carry a small phallus as a means of protection. Śaiva art has been dedicated, chiefly to the making of stone and bronze images of Lingam and Natarāja for use in the temples. The dance of Śiva which is the highest ideal of the art of dancing represents, "a dramatisation of the five activities – evolution, continuation, destruction, illusion and enlightenment – which constitute the world process."[8]

Historical evidence of Śaivism

The earliest reference of Śiva worship is found in the account of Megasthanes. Patañjali in the second century B.C. mentions the Śiva-Bhāgavatas, going about with iron, trident in hand. He also referes about the image of Śiva made of precious metals, which were used in domestic worship. The earliest coins bearing an image of Śiva with trident in hand on the obverse and Nandi on the reverse, are those of the Kuṣāṇas. About the same time, there arose in the Western India a preacher who became famous as Lakulīśa. He is the founder of Pāśupata Sect of Śaivism.

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7. The Cultural Heritage of India, p. 68.
8. Coomarswami, Dance of Śiva, pp. 56-57.

The flourishing condition of Śaivism under the Guptas is attested by the literary and archaeological sources. The Harṣacharita of Bāṇa furnishes the celebrated description of Bhairavāchārya which is a landmark in the history of Śaiva asceticism.

In South India, Śaivism is traceable from very early times and its influence grew in the age of great Pallavas. The Sangam literature knows of Śiva and his exploits. Manifestations of some of the Śaiva cults are amply attested by literature and inscriptions. The great Cholas were without exception Śaivas. The canon of Tāmil Śaivism became fixed, and this was followed by the growth of doctrinal literature.

Śaivism found its way in the islands of the Eastern Archipelago and in the Hinduized states of Greater India at a very early date. Fa-Hien found the Pāśupatas established in Java early in the fifth century A.D. The early Hindū kingdom of Champā was ruled by Śaiva kings. The dominant cult in Kambuja was Śaivism.

Śakti in Śaivism

One of the most important sides of Śaivism is the worship of Śakti or the female element. This worship is not exclusively Śivaitic. Many female beings are worshipped; but the worship of a Mahādevi is no-where so widespread as amongst the Śaivas.

Śaktism has a philosophical background in the idea of the power of the nature which produces everything. The worship of Mahādevi under various names is associated with Śiva. Often it superseded the worship of the God himself. The tantra literature accords the highest place to this female divinity. "Her worship is on the whole gloomy, and the sacrifice of animals, which is so hated by the Vaiṣṇavas, is common here."[9]

Pārvati, Ambikā, Umā, Durgā and Kāli are the various names of the Mahādevi. Kāli is a terrible goddess who drinks blood and devours corpses. By several secret performances people try to secure the favour of the great goddess. The attainment of superhuman powers is the object of the worship of Mahādevi. All sorts of magic spells and forms, words and

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9. De La Saussaye, Manual of the Science of Religion, p. 151.

figures, belong to Śaktism. Professor Vogel has drawn our attention to the prevalence of the practice of self-immolation by a head-offering to goddess, a practice attested by the sculpture and literature of South India.

Soon the Mahādevi was raised to the honour of Supreme Godhood. "As the lightning is born of the clouds and disappears with the clouds, so Brahman and all the other gods take birth from Kāli and will disappear in Kāli." She came to be regarded as the Supreme Mother who evolves this universe and destroys it. Śāktas hold that when Śiva and Śakti are possessed of desire they love and the world is created. The general philosophical position of the Śāktas cult is essentially Vedantic.

Vaiṣṇavism

Viṣṇu was not regarded as the greatest god in early vedic times. Viṣṇu in the Ṛigveda is a sun-god. He is believed by scholars to represent the sun in its daily and yearlv courses. According to a legend in the Śatapatha-Brāhmaṇa,[10] Viṣṇu's head was severed from his body and became the sun. There is a belief that the three steps of Viṣṇu are the three periods of the sun's course: rise, culmination and setting. But Keith points out that this interpretation is not in keeping with the highest place of Viṣṇu. In the later vedic period Viṣṇu became one of the greatest gods in the Hindū pantheon. Aitareya Brāhmaṇa[11] calls him the Param and Agni the avama among the gods. In the Maitri upaniṣad,[12] food that sustains the universe is called Bhagavat Viṣṇu. In the later vedic literature, Viṣṇu is often found to have recourse to cunning devices to help Indra and other friends and to defeat the Asuras. These legends were responsible for some aspects of the Viṣṇu mythology in the epic and Paurāṇic literature.

According to De La Saussaye, Viṣṇu owes his high place in Indian religion to the fact that he came in contact with Kṛṣṇa, and became assimilated with him. The rich mythology and the religious value of the worship of Viṣṇu as almost entirely the result of this meeting. The two most sacred books of the

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[10] Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa, XIV. 1.1.
[11] Aitareya Brāhmaṇa, 1.1.
[12] Maitri Upaniṣad, VI. 13.

Vaiṣṇava, the Bhāgavata Purāṇa and the Gitā are especially in praise of Kṛṣṇa. The way in which these two are thought of as one can be seen in the doctrine of Avatāras. In these Avatāras we find Viṣṇu as a great friend and helper. This doctrine gives the Vaiṣṇavas an opportunity to prove their tolerance of various divine beings. It is the result of this tolerance that even Buddha is considered an Avatāra of Viṣṇu. Generally the number of Avatāras are given as ten. In the first Avatāra Viṣṇu assumed the form of a fish to save Manu's ship in the great deluge. In the form of a tortoise, He helped the gods to lift numerous valuable treasures out of the sea. As a boar He conquered an evil demon and made the earth appear again out of water. As a Narsiṁha he freed the world from the yoke of a cruel tyrant. In the form of a dwarf he conquered another tyrant. As Paraśu-Rāma, he destroyed the supremacy of the caste of warriors. The other Rāma the enemy of Rāvaṇa was the next incarnation. The eighth was Kṛṣṇa and the ninth Buddha. The tenth Avatāra is still expected, when He will appear as Kalki to punish the wicked and save the good. In the words of Monier Williams, "Before concluding the subject of incarnation, we may observe that Viṣṇu is the only member of the Tri-mūrti who can be said to have infused his essence into actual flesh and blood for the salvation of the world in times of peril."[13] Viṣṇu's ten chief incarnations appear to symbolize a kind of evolution of organic life.

Vaiṣṇavism describes Viṣṇu as the source and resting place of the world. There is nothing higher than He. When man takes refuge in Him, he attains salvation. The man who resorts to God' by Bhaktiyoga becomes immortal by being free from the three qualities that cause bondage.

The Vaiṣṇavas are distinguished into various principal sets. Of these the Rāmānujas or Śri Vaiṣṇavas form the orthodox and larger portion of this sect. This sect was founded by Āchārya Rāmānuja about the middle of the twelfth century A.D. The followers of this sect worship Viṣṇu and Lakshmī in their various manifestations. The teachers of this sect or Brāhmaṇas but the disciples may be of any caste. Vedāntāchārya, a follower of Rāmānuja made some reform in the Vaiṣṇava faith, which gave rise to two antagonistic parties. The Northern school or the Vadagalai regard self-surrounder as one of the ways to salvation. But the Southern school or the Tengalai regard self-surrounder as the only way to salvation. The Northern school accept the Vedas but the Southerners have compiled a Veda of their own called "Nalayira Prabandha", in Tāmil, and hold it to be older than the Vedas. The Vedagalais regard Lakshmī as the consort of Viṣṇu, uncreated and equally to be adored as a means for release. The Tengalais regard Lakshmī as the created female being, though divine.

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[13] Hinduism, pp. 108-109.

The two sects have different frontal mark. The Vadagalais make simple white line curved like the letter U to represent the sole of the right foot of Lord Viṣṇu. They add a central red mark as a symbol of Lakshmī. The Tengalais make a white mark letter Y which represents both the feet of Lord Viṣṇu. They draw a white line half down the nose. Both the sects brand the emblems of Viṣṇu—the discus and the conch on their shoulders, breasts and arms.

According to Vaiṣṇavism, Viṣṇu the Supreme Being and the universe are one. There is no duality of existence. Yet the Supreme Spirit has been pleased to manifest Himself to his creatures in various ways. The modes of obtaining bliss are five-fold. These are cleaning the temples and images, providing flowers and perfumes for religious rites, the presentation of bloodless offerings, the use of rosary of Tulsi seeds and finally the effort to unite with the deity.

The following are the principal divisions of Vaiṣṇavism founded by leaders who lived at different epochs.

1. The Nimbārkas.
2. The Rāmānujas.
3. The Mādhavāchāryas.
4. The Rāmānandas.
5. The Vallabhāchāryas.
6. The Chaitanyas.

The common link of all these sect is their belief in the supremacy of Viṣṇu. According to Monier Williams,[14] "Their differences consists in the character assigned to that god, in the practices and usages founded thereon by the leader to which each sect owes its origin, in the philosophical doctrines taught by that leader, and in distinctive sectarian marks."

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[14] Hinduism, p. 138.

Vaiṣṇavism in Greater India

With the spread of Indian culture outside India the Viṣṇu cult spread abroad, at least from the early centuries of christian era. Pūrṇavarman a king of Java is compared to Viṣṇu. He was supposed to be an incarnation of Viṣṇu and his footprints are known to have been worshipped.

The earliest inscription of the ancient kingdom of Champā refers to Viṣṇu together with Maheśvara, Umā, Brahmā and other deities. Lakshmī was a well-known goddess in Champā. In a later period the kings of Champā often claimed to have been incarnations of Viṣṇu.

The earliest inscriptions referring to the spread of Vaiṣṇavism in Cambodia are to be assigned to the beginning of the sixth century A.D.

The Śāktas

The adoration of the female energy dates from a very early period. In the Mahābhārata there is a hymn addressed to Durgā by Arjuna under the advice of Kriṣṇa in which she is prayed for granting victory in the forthcoming battle. It appears that when the hymn was composed, Durgā had already acquired such an importance that she was adored as a powerful goddess. There is another hymn in Mahābhārata in which she is called Mahiṣāsuranāśini. She is called the most beloved of Nārāyaṇa and the sister of Vāsudeva. She resides permanently on the Vindhya mountain.

The seven Śaktis, Brāhmi, Maheśvari, Kaumāri, Vaiṣṇavi, Vārahi, Narsiṁhi and Aaindri, which are the powers of the gods from whom their names are derived, are called her excellent forms. In the words of R.G. Bhandarkar[15] 'A further development went on especially under the influence of the idea of Śakti, or power, and thus we have three forms in which the goddess is worshipped. First we have the ordinary bland form, in which the goddess is worshipped. Then we have the fierce form, in which she is associated with the schools of Kāpālikas and Kāḷāmukhas, and animals and human beings are sacrificed. And the third is the sensual form, in which she is the object of worship with the school of Śāktas, who are so called because they are worshippers of Śakti."

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[15] Vaiṣṇavism, Śaivism and Minor Religious Systems, p. 144.

The adoration of female energy look a grosser form in about the tenth century A.D., in consequence of the publication of the Tantras, a class of works in which the female energy is worshipped through the "maternal organ" which is regarded as a symbol of self-existent and all productive nature. The adherents of Tantra ritual are termed as Śāktas. They are divided into two sections, Dakshinas and Vāmāchāris. The Vāmāchāris worship a naked woman as goddess. The female organ is the direct object of worship and intoxicating liquors, fish, flesh, mystical diagrams and incantations are essentials. The votaries of Śakti assemble at midnight in secret places. Every stage of the proceedings is invested with a mystical meaning and the whole terminates in licentious sensual indulgence. Edward Moor[16] observes, "These orgies may not be so common or so abominable as they once were, yet they occur far too frequently."

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[16] The Hindū Pantheon, p. 365.

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Symbolism of the Ten Avataras

Hindū mythology is replete with allusions and references of the Avatāras of Viṣṇu. The word means a descent, in which it is still retained in several dialects of India. But in the sense now under consideration, it means an incarnation of a deity. Such incarnations have been many. But speaking of the Avatāras, it is generally meant to be confind to the ten incarnations of Viṣṇu. There is a view that these ten incarnations appear to symbolize a kind of evolution of organic life. The ten Avatāras are usually arranged and named as following:

1. Matsya, or Fish,
2. Kūrma, or the Tortoise,
3. Varāha, or Boar,
4. Narasiṁha, or Man-Lion,
5. Vāman, or Dwarf,
6. Paraśurāma, or Rāma with the axe,
7. Rāma,
8. Krişņa,
9. Buddha,
10. Kalki.

of these, nine are past, the tenth is yet to come.

The Matsya

In the reign of the seventh Manu the whole earth was destroyed by a flood. The pious prince, the seven Rishis and their several wives, who by command of Viṣṇu entered a spacious vessel, accompanied by pairs of all animals. Viṣṇu, assuming the form of a fish, commanded the ark to be fastened by a cable, formed of a vast serpent, to his stupendous horn, secured thereby until the flood subsided, when He and Brahmā slew a monster named Hyagriva. The only function of the Fish as an incarnation of Viṣṇu appears to save Manu from the Great flood and to help him to assume the role of a creator. Coomarswami[1] tries to trace the antiquity of the flood legend to the Atharvaveda. But it is difficult to accept it. The legend is found in its fully developed form in the Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa[2]. The story runs as follows :

One morning, when Manu was washing his hands with water, a small fish came into his hands. The fish requested Manu to rear it up and promised him to save his life from an all destroying flood. On an inquiry from the Manu, the fish replied, "Thou will first keep me in a jar. When I outgrow that, you will take me into a pond prepared by you. When I outgrow that you will take me down to the sea, for then I shall be beyond destruction." Soon it grew into a big fish. It asked Manu to prepare a ship and board it when the flood would come. Thus the Manu was saved during the Great Flood.

In fact the Matsya is a synonym for the water of life. It symbolizes the power of fertility, which led to the identification of the fish and Viṣṇu. The symbolic significance of the fish in the early period is attested by a couple of finds from Sāranāth and Mathurā. In the words of Kalpana Desai[3], "Not many images of the fish incarnation have been found, and these that are available belong to the post-Gupta period." The fish incarnation, executed as half man and half-fish has been referred to by R.C.Kak. This image from Jammu, is of crude workmanship. The fish incarnation, depicted as a simple fish on the full-blown lotus, is known from Garhwā in Allahabad district. A beautiful image of the fish incarnation has come to light from Chambā belonging to about the eleventh century A.D. In the Udaipur Museum a large fish is carved on the top of the panel and below it are the four emblems of Viṣṇu, pleaced between the coils of a Nāga.

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1. Yakṣas, p. 53.
2. Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa, 1, 8, 1-9.
3. Iconography of Viṣṇu, p. 63.

In the Mahābhārata, the fish is an incarnation of Brahmā.

The Kūrma

The second grand Avatāra of Viṣṇu is in the form of a tortoise. Evidently it is also connected with the Great Flood. Edward Moor[4] observes, "For the purpose of restoring to man some of the comforts and conveniences that were lost in the flood, Viṣṇu is fabled to have become incarnate again in the form of a tortoise: in which shape he sustained the mountain Mandara placed on his back to serve as an axis, where on the gods and demons, the vast serpent Vasuki serving as a rope, churned the ocean for the recovery of the Amrita, or beverage of immortality." The result of the operation was the obtainment of fourteen gems. The Amrita is generally understood as the primary object of this churning process.

The tortoise is often revered in the later vedas. It is respected as the regulator of the sun. In the Atharvaveda he is connected with the sun:

"What silver, Kaśyapa, thou hast refulgent, what brightly shining lotus flower collected, wherein are gathered seven suns together..."[5]

It is quite possible that the disc-like shell of the tortoise, its slow movement and the act of withdrawing within its cells may have inspired the poets to identify it with the sun. In the Śatapatha Brāhamaṇa[6] the tortoise is identified with the life-sap of this world, the whole universe and the sun. Symbolism of the tortoise has been discussed in detail in the Śatapatha Brāhamaṇa. In the Vājasneyi Saṁhitā[7], the Kaśyapa is also called the lord of waters. Great reverence is paid to the cosmic tortoise in the Jaiminiya Brāhmaṇa[8]. These references make it clear that the tortoise symbolizes the sun and the waters. The Kūrma played an important part in the churning of the ocean in which it served as a support of the mountain Mandara. According to Dr. Coomarswami[9] the legend of the churning of the ocean has its roots in the Vedas. The story has been narrated in detail in the two great epics.

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[4] The Hindū Pantheon, p. 111.
[5] Griffith's Translation A.V. XIII, 3,10.
[6] Śatapatha Brāhamaṇā. VII, 5.1.
[7] Vājasneyi Saṁhitā, 13, 31.
[8] Jaiminiya Brāhmaṇa, III, 203, 27 D.

The identification of the tortoise and Viṣṇu might have taken place in the Gupta period. In the Viṣṇu Purāṇa it is said that Viṣṇu assumed the form of Kūrma at the time of churning of the ocean. Like the fish incarnation, the tortoise incarnation is also very rarely sculptured and worshipped. D.B. Spooner refers to a clay tortoise from Basārh, of the Gupta period. There is no mark of reverence paid to it. One of the most notable images of the tortoise incarnation is in the collection of the Bharat Kala Bhavan, Vārāṇsi. A striking feature of this image is the presence of a small four handed figure of Viṣṇu holding his usual emblem, on the neck of the tortoise. There is a panel showing the churning of the ocean in the Gwalior Museum. The same scene is carved on the door jamb of the Lakshamaṇa temple of Khajurāho. In the words of Kalpana Desai[10], "The rarity of the Matsya and Kūrma Avatāra may tempt one to conclude that these Avatāras had hardly any relevance for the worshippers of Viṣṇu, but at the same time there is every possibility that there might have been a small number of Vaiṣṇavas who worshipped these Avatāras. There are all the possibilities that these were the totems or the primitive cults and later the Brāhmanic tradition incarporated them and bestowed them high symbolic significance."

The Varāha

In this Avatāra, Viṣṇu is generally represented fourhanded and with the head of boar, on whose tusks rests a crescent, containing in its concavity an epitome of earth, which had been immerged in the ocean as a punishment for its iniquities. Thus it appears that this Avatāra like the previous two is the repitition of the story of the deluge.

There are many stories accounting for the boar incarnation. In one story it is related, that a Daitya named Hiraṇayāksha passed a long life in practising religious austerities and was granted

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9. Yakṣas, p. 53.
10. Iconography of Viṣṇu, p. 69.

a boon by Brahmā. By this boon the Daitya became the universal monarch and was exempted from hurt by noxious animals which he enumerated. But he omitted the hog. The Daitya became very wicked. He seized the earth and carried it into the depths of the ocean. Now Viṣṇu assuming the form of a boar, a symbol of strength, dived into the sea and after a dreadful contest of a thousand years, slew the wicked monster and restored the earth on the point of his tusks.

The origin of the Varāha worship can be traced back to the period when people saw divinity in the varied forces of nature. According to some scholars Varāha cult existed in the Vedic or the pre-Vedic period. In the Ṛigveda several gods have been equated with the boar. Rudra is addressed as the boar of the sky. In the Brāhmanic literature, the relation of Varāha with the earth is fully established. The boar becomes a personified form of the Prajāpati. According to V.S.Agrawala[11], Agni and Sūrya are the names of Varāha. In the Bhāgawata it is said that Varāha is the triple force of the cosmos which according to the Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa is symbolized by the sun. The first detailed account of the Varāha myth is found in the Harivaṁsa.[12] Several images of Varāha belonging to the Gupta period testify to the strong prevalence of Varāha worship during that period. The colossal Varāha image of Udaigiri is a two handed figure standing on the Śeṣa supporting the goddess on his snout. This huge figure signifies the conquest of earth by the great Gupta King Vikramāditya. A very interesting image is found from Eran in Sagar district. It bears a Brāhmi inscription dated in the first regnal year of the Huṇa chief Tormāṇa. The image is somewhat similar to Udaigiri Varāha. It is an interesting point to note that all the early images of Varāha except the one of the Kuṣāṇa period, are two handed. It is only in the late Gupta period that Varāha images have four hands. The post-Gupta and mediaeval period have produced many Varāha images all over Northern India. The most common type is the image with four hands.

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11. Yajña Varāha—An interpretation, Purāṇa, Vol. V, No.2, p. 225 ff.
12. Harivaṁsa, III, 34, 30-43.

The Narasiṁha

The first complete exposition of the Narasiṁha Avatāra is found in the Harivaṁsa. The Demon Hiraṇyakaśipu performed for ten thousand years the most rigorous austerities in honour of Brahmī and obtained the boon he sought. This boon assured him protection against gods and demons, gandharvas and Yakṣas, human beings, evil spirits and beasts. He remained unaffected by the weather and remained safe in heaven or the nether world. He could only be murdered by one who was capable of killing him merely with a single stroke of his hand. His arrogance became so great that the gods approached Brahmā who directed them to Viṣṇu. After the repeated prayers of the gods for the destruction of the demon, Viṣṇu assumed the form of a Man-lion and killed him. After the death of his father Prahlād became the ruler of the Daityas.

Numerous Narasiṁha images found in the Gupta period indicate a wide prevalence of Narasiṁha worship. In the post-Gupta period, Narasiṁha is almost invariably represented as killing the great demon. It appears that Narasiṁha was regarded as one of the most favourite incarnations of Viṣṇu in almost all parts of Northern India. Lion is an embodiment of valour. Goetz[13] suggests that Narasiṁha worship is the result of the Scythian influence.

The Vāman

Prahlāda's son was Virochana, and his son was Bali. Bali became a very powerful ruler. He conquered Indra and ruled over the three worlds. At one time when Bali was celebrating a grand sacrifice, Viṣṇu assuming the shape of a dwarf, humbly approached the demon king. Pleased with the Vāmana, Bali asked him to demand a boon. The dwarf demanded only so much ground as he could measure with three paces. The king smilingly granted such a humble request. Now to obtain his boon, the dwarf strode with one pace over the earth, with a second over the intermediate space, and with a third over the sky. Now Bali was left only with the subterranean regions, which was assigned to him for his future abode. According to the Bhāgavata-Purāṇa the following words, which may serve as one of many instances to show how sacred a promise was held by the Hindūs when once given and even though artfully obtained: "If renowned chief of the gods, you consider the word which I uttered to be deceitful, I now do what is sincere, and can be no deception—place your third step on my head. Fallen from my position, I fear not the infernal regions, or binding in bonds, or misfortune difficult to escape, or loss of wealth, or your restraint so much as I am afflicted by a bad name". For his righteousness Viṣṇu promised that after a temporary residence in one of the most delightful places of Pātāla, he should be born as the Indra in the reign of eighth Manu.

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[13] The early Wooden Temples of Chambā, p. 85.

In this incarnation Viṣṇu is supposed to be the son of Kaśyapa and Aditi and the younger brother of Indra. It is said that this Avatāra occurred in the Tretā whereas the first four Avatāras are said to have occurred in Satayuga.

It is an established fact that the myth of the dwarf has its germ in the three steps of Viṣṇu referred to in the Ṛigveda.[14] His three steps represent, the rising, the mid-day and the setting sun. Macdonell further interprets the three steps as the course of the solar deity through the three divisions of the universe.

The iconographical representation of Viṣṇu is mainly done in two ways. He is either sculptured as a Vāmana or as Trivikrama. The Agni Purāṇa prescribes the umbrella and the staff as his emblem, if the figure of Vāmana is two handed. A number of four handed mediaeval images of Vāmana holding the emblems of Viṣṇu are available. It deserves attention that the early images are invariably two-handed. A beautiful four-handed image of Vāmana, pot-bellied standing on a lotus pedastal, datable to the 9th century A.D., is preserved in the collection of Bharat Kala Bhavan, Vārāṇsi. The mythology of the Vāmana incarnation has been more frequently represented as Trivikrama, when Viṣṇu grew into the Virāta to measure the whole world.

The Vāmana worship must have in vogue right from the third century of our era. The Mahābhārata refers to a Tirtha called Vāmana Tirtha. The Vāmana Purāṇa also mentions that Kota

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[14] Macdonell, Vedic Mythology, p. 39.

Tirtha of Vāmana was a prominent place of pilgrimage. According to V.S. Agrawala it was located somewhere in Kurukshetra region. The Junāgadh Rock Inscription of Skandagupta opens with the invocation of Viṣṇu in his Vāmana incarnation. Kālidāsa in the Raghuvaṁśa alludes the difficult task of Vāmana, comparing with his own.

It is amply clear from the above narration that Vāman, like the Varāha and Narasiṁha incarnations, must have been worshipped by the people right from the Gupta period. Vāmana and Trivikrama images are scattered all over Northern India. But they do not exhibit many varieties from the iconographic point of view. The two-handed Vāmana images are commonly found in the Gupta period. And the fourhanded variety is an evolution of the Mediaeval period.

Paraśurāma

Previous Avatāras obtained importance largly due to their symbolic significance rooted in the ancient past. But paraśurāma appears to be a historical figure, later on exalted to the position of an incarnation of Viṣṇu. In the words of Kalpana Desai[15], "Hence with the advent of Paraśurāma some historicity is introduced into the Avatāra cycle of Viṣṇu."

The famous story of Paraśurāma is related in detail in the Mahābhārata. Paraśurāma was the last son of the sage Jamadagni and Renukā. Once Renukā incurred the anger of her husband. She was killed by her son Paraśurāma at the bidding of Jamadagni. Pleased with his deed, the sage offered a boon to his son. Paraśurāma asked for the resurrection of his mother and the four brothers.

Once king Kārtavirya came to the hermitage of Jamadagni and was hospitably received by the sage. The sage possessed a cow of plenty which supplied everything which he wished. Struck by the precious qualities of the cow Kārtavirya carried off with him the cow and the calf. So Paraśurāma went and killed the king. To avenge their father's death Kārtavirya's son murdered the sage

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[15] Iconography of Viṣṇu, p. 111.

Jamadagni in the absence of Paraśurāma. Thereupon, Paraśurāma made a vow to extripate the whole Kshatriya race. He undertook his campaign of destruction twenty-one times. It appears that a real historical conflict between Brāhmaṇas and Kshatriyas underlies the conception of this Avatāra. It may not be out of place to mention here that the character of Paraśurāma is represented unfavourably in the Rāmāyaṇa. He is defeated by Rāma the son of Daśratha, which may be the result of an attempt to establish the supremacy of Kshatriyas over the Brāhmaṇas. This Avatāra hardly attains any importance among the worshippers of Viṣṇu. It is indicated by the very few images that have been found. Temples were not usually dedicated to him. There are a couple of temples in Gujrat probably owing to his traditional association with the river Narmadā. All the images that have come to light are datable to the mediaeval period.

Rāma

The story of Rāma is well-known. The Mahābhārata version is similar to the Rāmāyaṇa and the Purāṇas also follow Vālmiki in treating Rāma's life. C. Buckle[16] has thoroughly studied the evolution of Rāma legend and has come to the conclusion that Rāma was originally a hero later on defied and identified with Viṣṇu. According to Macdonell[17], "In Ayodhyā, the, there must have been current among the court bards a number of epic tales narrating the fortunes of the Ikṣvāku hero Rāma. Such legends, we may assume Vālmiki worked up in a single homogeneous production—Rāmāyaṇa."

Rāvaṇa, the king of Lankā, by his austerities, obtained from Brahmā a boon that neither gods nor demons should be able to take his life. In consequence the monster oppressed the whole universe. The gods thus, seeing their own existence endangered, implored Brahmā to protect them. Brahmā advised the gods to pray Viṣṇu to become incarnate. Viṣṇu granted their prayer. Thus he was born as a son of Daśaratha and Kauśalyā.

In the Rāmāyaṇa, excepting the later interpolations, Rāma is merely a great hero portrayed as an ideal son, husband, brother and king. Winternitz[18] has propounded the theory that apart from a few passages, which are doubtless interpolated, Rāma is always treated as a mortal and there is no indication of his being conceived as an incarnation. In fact Rāma is a symbol of an ideal Hindū King. He never degraded that culture which can still boast about its superiority in the whole world. During the whole course of war with the Rākṣasas his behaviour has been excellent. After the death of Rāvaṇa he placed Vibhiṣaṇa on the throne of Lankā and returned to Ayodhyā with Sitā. At the end of long and glorious reign he became reunited with the splendour of Viṣṇu. The legend of Rāma-Avatāra has greatly influenced the Indian religion and culture. This story has been briefly told in the Mahābhārata, and in several Purāṇas. In the Agni Purāṇa[19] Rama is deseribed as holding the bow, the arrow, the sword and the conch. Episodes from the life of Rāma are profusely carved on the walls of early temples.

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[16] Rāma Kathā, pp. 129–37.

[17] History of Sanskrit Literature, p. 306.

Rāmāyaṇa seems to have become popular in the Gupta period. But Rāma worship forming its own separate cult, does not seem to have existed before the Mediaeval period. An attempt has been made to synthesize the form of Rāma with Śiva when the cult of Rāma had, gained importance. He holds all the Śaivite āyudhas.

Kriṣṇa

In this Avatāra Viṣṇu is said to have manifested himself in a degree of power and glory far exceeding any other of his forms. It is the most interesting incarnation of Viṣṇu, both on account of the opportunity which it affords to trace the gradual transformation of mortal heroes into representatives of a god, and on account of numerous legends connected with it. His mortal parents were Vasudeva and Devaki. The principal lengends relating to Kriṣṇa as he appears in the Harivaṁśa and the Purāṇas are the following:

A demon king Kaṁsa of Mathurā had deposed and imprisoned his father Ugrasena. He was a tyrant and oppressed all. Ultimately Brahmā prayed to Viṣṇu to relieve the world of its distress. When Brahmā ended his prayer, Viṣṇu plucked off hairs,

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18. History of Indian Literature, Vol. III, p. 515.
19. Agni Puraāṇa, 49, 6.

one white and one black, and promised the gods that these two hairs should become inpersonated as Balarāma and Krișņa, sons of Devaki to fulfil their wishes. The Harivaṁśa gives a detailed account of Krișņa-Lilā which is not to be found anywhere in the Mahābhārata itself. The Bhāgavata Purāņa, the sacred book of the Vaișņavas follows to a great extent the Harivaṁśa. Sculptors have made use of almost all the important stories of Krișņa. It includes Pūtanāvadha, Kāliya-Mardana, Govardhana-dhāraņa and Kaṁsa-vadha.

The childhood feats of Krișņa are over with the death of Kaṁsa. His later life is generally not depicted in stone. A fifth century panel from Garhwā now in the Lucknow Museum, represents Krișņa witnessing the fight between Bhīma and Jarāsandha. Several incidents of Krișņa's life are portrayed on the panels of Dasāvatāra temple at Sirpur. In the Laksmaņa temple at Khajurāho Krișņa is shown as an infant in his feats of very early age. In later incidents he is more advanced towards his teens and wears Mukuța and other ornaments.

The incarnation of Krișņa seems to have been popular right from the Gupta period as it happened in the case of Rāma. It is an interesting point to note that the earthly career of Krișņa was brought to its close by an event which is more consistent with the end of a mortal hero than with that of an incarnated god.

Buddha

Vișņu is epiphany as Buddha is originally foreign to the cycle of the Avatāras of Vișņu. Therefore it is briefly alluded to in some Purūņas. It appears that Buddha was added to the list of the incarnations of Vișņu only after the Gupta period. He is not bound sculptured except on the Dasāvatāra panels.

The images of Buddha does not carry any of the Vaișņava emblem according to the injunction of Agni Purāņa. He has a calm appearance, long ears and a halo behind him. He is seated on a high lotus pedastal and his hands are in the abhaya and the varada-mudrā. In fact the Buddha Avatāra is symbolic of compromise between Brāhmanism and Buddhism.

Kalki

It is yet to come. Kalki incarnation will appear at the end of the Kali Age[20]. According to the Agni Purāṇa he will be holding the sword, the conch and the disc and the mace[21]. The incarnation of Kalki is generally found in the Dasāvatāra panels, seated on the horse holding a sword. The Viṣṇu Purāṇa observes that when the practices taught by the Vedas and the institutes of law, shall have ceased, and the close of the Kali age shall be nigh, Viṣṇu shall then be born in eminent Brāhmaṇa family of Sambhala village. He shall be endowed with eight superhuman faculties. He will destroy then all the barbarians and thieves, and all whose minds are devoted to iniquity.

This incarnation is symbolic of a new era of purity and order.

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[20] Bhāgavata Purāṇa, 1,3.26.
[21] Agni Purāṇa, 49,9.

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Symbols of Tree and Serpent

Tree-Worship

It is one of the oldest and most widely extended forms of worship. In the words of E.W. Hopkins[1], "It appears to the savage who fears the forest ; to the barbarian who sees in the tree the spirit of productivity ; and to civilized man, to whom the tree is emblematic of divinity." Hopkins further holds that probably the tree-world as a whole was an earlier object of cult than any individual tree, as the savage dreads the power of the jungle and placates it rather than that of any one tree known to him. The forest as a whole is dangerous also to the more advanced animist who fears the spirit of the wild. But the tree is more beneficent. Most people will agree with the remark that "There are few of the works of nature that combine so many and so varied charms and beauties as a forest ; that whether considered generally or particularly, whether as a grand geographical feature of a country or as a collection of individual trees, it is alike invested with beauty and with interest, and opens up to the mind a boundless field for inquiry into the mysterious laws of creation. But a forest is not merely an aggregate of trees, it is not merely an embodiment of vegetable life : it is the cheerful and pleasant abode of numerous varieties of animal life, who render it more animated and picturesque, and who find their shelter, food and happy homes."

There is no exaggeration in saying that trees line the road to prosperity. B.C. Sinha[2] observes, "Magnificent rows of trees can still be seen alongside road which speak of the wisdom of our ancestors and bear testimony to the prosperity of those times. Trees of the

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1. Origin and Evolution of Religion, p. 22.
2. Tree-worship in Ancient India, p. 13.

countryside not only provide a background of charm, but also acted as a source of much raw material needed by the village people." It is well-known fact that man cannot live without trees. They provide him with timber, fuel, fruits, fodder and shade. They mitigate the severity of the climate, protect the soil and conserve the water. The very existence of man depends upon the proper husbanding of soil and water. The trees are indispensable link in safeguarding these vital resources. In the words of Lord Buddha, "The forest is a peculiar organism of unlimited kindness and benevolence that makes no demand for its substenance and extends generously the products of its life activity ; it affords production to all beings, offering shade even to the axeman who destroys it."

There is no need in saying that forests have always captured the imagination of our people and there are countless references to this great heritage in the ancient literature and the art of the country. According to James Fergusson tree-worship is one of the earliest forms of religion in Ancient India. It was through the worship of the trees that man attempted to approach and propitiate God. Before man developed agriculture, he lived mostly on fruits and nuts of trees. He used their implements in war and peace. It was from the wood that he obtained fire to cook his food and to warm his cave dwellings. Apart from these, it is the beauty of their flowers which excited his imagination. In the words of Fergusson[3], "With all their poetry, and all their usefulness, we can hardly feel astonished that the primitive races of mankind should have considered trees as the choicest gift of the gods to men and should have believed that their spirits still delighted to dwell among their branches, or spoke oracles through the rustling of their leaves."

Trees have undoubtedly played a vital role in the field of human welfare and they are doing it even now. They shall be playing this important role so long human life exists on the face of this earth. No words can describe the full usefulness of trees and plants. They provide shade, protection to crops, fodder for animals and timber for rural and urban consumption. In our

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3. Tree and Serpent Worship, p. 1-2.

remote past tree-planting was a habit deeply ingrained in the people. But according to Charles Hamilton, modern India has shown a strange neglect of the culture of it and a knowledge of its usefulness. In fact tree is the highest and noblest production of the vegetable kingdom, just as man holds highest place in the animals. Thus the two highest and noblest productions were bound to come closer. Now it is easy to understand how in our remote past men in their efforts to worship the Supreme Being, worshipped trees. "Their beauty when single, their grandeur as forests, their grateful shades in the hot climate, their mysterious form of life, suggested them as the abodes of departed spirits, or of existing agencies of the creator."[4] The abstract sacred character of trees is not difficult to conceive and as the intellect progressed among the early races of the world, Greeks, Āryans, and the Hebrews contributed towards its development. Sacred trees appear in the earliest mythologies of the world. There is no part of the world in which trees have not been regarded with special reverence. According to Evelyin, "Paradise itself was a kind of sacred grove, planted by God and given to man." Biblical episode informs us about the planting of "Trees of life and Knowledge" in the Garden of Eden.

In the symbolism of the most ancient nations the sacred tree sometimes figures as a type of the universe, and represents the whole system of created things, put more frequently as a tree of life. According to Jewish tradition, the Tree of Life was a date-palm. It is a Tree of Life with the Egyptians also. According to to Barlow all the beautiful, grand and highly useful trees in every land have been associated with the noble and beneficial ideas which man has attributed to God or to nature.

Furlong observes, "The numerous tales of holy trees, groves and gardens represented everywhere and in every possible form, fortify me in my belief that tree-worship was first known and after it came Lingam or Phallic, with of course, its female form Adama."

All the Eastern literature is full with the stories told of and under the sacred fig tree. Under its holy shade, gods, goddesses, men and animals talk with each other on sacred themes. From holy trees gods and holy men ascended in heaven. In chinese mythology, the 'World Tree' that supports the universe is peach tree. In Japanese stories, the 'Tree of Life' is mentioned as growing on the Harai mountain. In our country, to the present hour, we find thousands of barren women worshipping the Pīpal or Bar tree to obtain offspring. It is a popular belief that from rubbing together the woods of Pīpal, Bar and Gooler, the holy fire is drawn from heaven, and before all their species do women crave their desires from God. With regard to ficus, Forlong observes, "The tree has many peculiarities, not only in its leaves and modes of leafling, but in its fruits and modes of multiplying which could not fail to make it of a very holy and important character in the pious, poetical and imaginative mind of the East." The Ficus tree is often hollow in the centre and if the hollow exists near the base, a Lingam or Yoni stone will be found.

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[4] Phallic Tree-worship, p. 2.

In a country like ours the trees of Pīpal, Bar and Gooler have offered a cool shelter from the burning rays of the sun. So it was quite natural to see them with great respect. It is the extreme usefulness of these trees that they have been protected by religious injunctions and their planting is encouraged by a promise of eternal bliss in the future world. The injunctions against cutting a fig tree is so strict that Rāvaṇa is made to say, "I have not cut down any fig tree in the month of Vaiśākh, why then does the calamity befall me?" It proves that as early as the Rāmāyaṇa age, the planting of trees was considered to be meritorious.

The celebrated Pañchvati garden where Sitā was imprisoned, has been reproduced by a many religious Hindū, and should any of them not have sufficient place to cultivate the five trees, custom is to plant them in a small pot where they are dwarfed into small shrubs.

Harappan Culture

In India, the tree-worship became quite common in the third or fourth millenium B.C. when there was a highly evolved Harappan culture. Among the seals of Mohanjodaro, one is depicting a stylised Pīpal tree with two heads of unicorn emerging from its stem. A seal from Harappā is engraved with the likeness of weeping willow tree with hanging branches. Painted pottery of the Indus valley often includes palms and Pīpal trees etc. In an environment full of danger to life the trees were the best friends of men. That is way the Indus people regarded them as beneficent devatās. In fact it was supposed to be a symbol of fertility. In the words of V.S. Agrawala[5], "On a seal from Harappā a woman is represented with a plant coming out of her womb, a flamboyant symbol of fertility."

Vedic Period

To a very great extent the foundation of Indian culture and civilization was laid up by the Āryans. The object of worship were the great phenomena of nature, conceived as alive. Trees naturally occupied an important place in their scheme of worship. The plant of Soma was so beneficial for them that it came to occupy an important rank among the chief deities of the Vedic period. The Soma must have owed its divine rank to its wonderful intoxicating power. To the priest Agni and Soma were of greater importance than Indra. The abode of Soma is heaven. He is the lord of that place. He is said to have been brought down from heaven by an eagle. Being the most important of herbs, Soma is said to have been born as the lord of plants. He is the lord of the wood and has generated all plants. In vedic hymns, Soma is frequently called as Amrita. There can be little doubt that the Indo-Europeans, before they separated into different branches, had a religion, in which tree worship occupied an important place. During the vedic period the trees became the sacrificial stake, or even the royal column venerated at the entrance to all the towns and villages.[6]

An important legacy received by Indian art from its Vedic sources of life and literature includes a large number of symbols in which trees and flowers also occupy an important place.

Post-Vedic Period

Buddhism adopted the cult of tree worship from the older religions which prevailed in the country. The trees which are associated with the birth of the Buddha are Śāla, Aśoka and

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5. Indian Art, p. 25.
6. J. Auboyer, Daily Life in Ancient India, p. 137.

Plākṣa. Gautama got enlightenment under a Pīpal tree and died in a grove of Śāla tree. Buddha is supposed to have a prior existence of indefinite length, during which he assumed five hundred and fifty births. In those previous births, forty-three times he was the Deva of a tree. This very fact shows the importance of tree worship in Buddhism.

As regards Jainism it was very close to Hinduism. So it is quite natural to suppose that tree worship occupied an important place in Jainism also. Sixth Tirthaṁkar Padmaprabhu has a lotus for his mark. Greater part of twelve years of Mahāvira in self penance and meditation must have been under a tree. When he obtained supreme knowledge, he was not far from a Śāla tree. Mahāvira often laid great emphasis for the security of animals and plants more than human beings.

During the times of the Mauryas greatest share of popular adoration accrued to Śiva and Viṣṇu. But the tree worship never lost its importance. Aśoka the Great encouraged planting of trees in gardens and along the road side. One of the earliest representation of tree cult is the Kalpavrikṣa of Vidiśā. It represents the mythical wish fulfilling tree which produced food, drinks, dresses, ornaments and even beautiful maidens. Coomarswami has identified this tree as a banyan tree. The banyan tree is regarded sacred to Viṣṇu and bestower of children to the barren women.

In the Gupta period the Purāṇas took their final literary form. In the Purāṇas trees have often been identified with gods. In the Padma Purāṇas, the Pīpal tree is an incarnation of Viṣṇu, Bar tree of Rudra and Palāśa tree of Brahmā. In the Varaka Purāṇa, the planter of a group of trees of a particular species is promised heavenly bliss. The Gupta period clearly shows that the tree worship was still popular in the golden days of Hindū renaissance.

During the mediaeval Hindū period Islamic iconoclasts not only broke the images but also destroyed the vast forest of Northern India. In the words of M.S. Randhawa[7], "Not only trees were cut but saplings were mercilessly nibbled by the flocks of goats, who converted West Punjāb from a green and flourishing land into a virtual desert." He further observes that the great tradition of woman and tree motif in sculpture came to an end in the 12th century. But the trees occupy an important place in the fable literature of the mediaeval Hindū period. It is an important point to note here that the tree motif was not entirely forgotten. In the Lakṣmaṇa temple at Khajurāho there is a charming bracket figure of a woman under a mango tree. In the sun temple at Konārka, some figures of woman are shown holding branches of trees. These trees are carved in a purely symbolic manner giving no indication of species.

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[7] The cult of Trees and Tree worship, p. 51.

It appears that the two names Pallava and Kadamba are symbolic of tree worship in the South. Pallava means the leaves of the tree and Kadamba is regarded as a very sacred tree by the Hindūs. Pīpal and Neem are grown together in Mysore. The Pīpal is regarded as the symbol of male and Neem as the symbol of female. A ceremonial marriage of these trees is performed. At Halebid in Mysore the Govardhana mountain which Kriṣṇa is supporting on his finger tips is covered with a forest of mangoes and plantains.

With regard to modern worship of trees numerous instances can be adduced. The Bodhi tree at Bodh Gayā is worshipped now as it was in the days of Aśoka. Tree-marriages are still common in India. "The wife who otherwise would get the evil result of a third marriage on the part of her husband thus casts the evil on the tree substitute, she herself becoming the fourth wife. This is a modern survival of a more general custom, according to which a tree was actually wedded to a human being, as being a similar anthropopathic creature. Thus, in the Hindū epic, a woman who wants children embraces a tree."[8] The tree is thus in itself the productive power and fertilizing strength emanates from it. In the words of B.C. Sinha[9].

"No words can express the importance of trees and plants in human life. As such India has been most forward in showing greatest respect to them. In our good ancient days when we

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8. E.W. Hopkings, Origin and Evolution of Religion, p. 23.
9. Tree worship in Ancient India, p. 86.

respected a thing too much divinity was granted to it, It was with the sole object of preservation of trees that Vana-Mahotsava was launched in 1950. Now a days people in the forest area have started Chipko movement. They do not want that their trees should be cut down. Trees have always been among the chief divinities of India. It is a tradition which will continue to inspire our future generations for ages to come."

Serpent-worship

It is very interesting to have knowledge of the mysterious serpent world. Many nations have known and still practice this form of animal worship. In the words of J. Vogel, "But it would be difficult to quote another instance in which it takes such a prominent place, in literature, folk lore and art, as it does in India. Nor would it be possible to name another country where the development of this cult can be studied during a period which may be estimated at no less than three millennia." For a very long period the defied serpents have been haunting the imagination of the Hindūs. The serpents appear in a variety of aspect in Indian literature and art. Sometimes they are endowed with magic properties. Frequently, they have the character of a water-spirit. They are capable of assuming any form they like. Very often they appear in human shape. Then they become pious ascetic and may develop in to a self-denying saint."[10]

Animals are worshipped as great living powers. The very strong beasts are universally revered for their prowess. For strength and virility the bull was worshipped in Greece and Egypt. A donkey imported to Afrioa was regarded by certain tribesmen as wise divinity and consulted as an oracle. Horses were oracular to the early Germans. The bull, cow and serpents along with many other animals are worshipped in India.

Serpents are among the earliest and most widely worshipped creatures. E.W. Hopkins[11] observes, "But any snakes beauty, sinuous motion, mysterious habits, power of fascination, its association with tombs and trees, at the root of which it is apt to live, its suggestive shape, are enough to make it respected as a being having occult and obscene powers." Its hole makes it a guardian of treasure. The old Germans thought that serpents, coming out of the ground, were peculiarly apt to be reincarnated spirits. The Lithuanians worshipped the house-snakes as relatives and guardians. The Hebrews worshipped serpents down to the days of Hezekiah. Chinese dragon-worship is a survival of serpent worship. The Africans worship snakes. The Mexicans worshipped serpents and exalted it into a deity. The wisdom of the snake makes it the protecting genius of the physicians in Greece. The serpents supposed power of healing, led to its becoming emblematic of life and reproduction. According to Fergusson Hindu serpent worship is Turanian and Buddhistic as opposed to Brahmanism. But there are no cogent reasons to support this view. "Sun worship and serpent worship may have been united as early as heliolithic culture."[12]

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[10] B.C. Sinha, Serpent Worship in Ancient India, Preface.

[11] Origin and Evolution of Religion, p. 36-37.

Serpent worship is common throughout India, both of the sculptural form and the living animal. The sculpture is invariably of the form of the Nāga. Sometimes there is a single Nāga, the hood being spread open. Occasionally the sculptured figures are nine in number, and this form is called the "Nava Nāga". The living snake is worshipped everywhere in India. Nāga-Pañchami is a famous festival of serpent worship, throughout the whole country. In Southern India, the deity under whose name the snake is worshipped is Subramaṇi. The shrine is located in the western part of Mysore. Serpent worship is especially resorted for prosperity and offsprings. Serpents generally live in the subterranean world and on the beds of rivers and lakes. Their capital is Bhogavati. Communication between their kingdom and the human world is established through the medium of caves and ant-hills. There is a popular belief that dropping off the skin by the serpents symbolizes the soul liberating itself from the cycle of rebirths. H. Zimmer holds that among the motifs from early Mesopotamian art which are continuing in the traditions of India is the pattern of entwined serpent-pair. This device is commonly found on votive slabs erected to serpent genii. Such stone tablets

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12. Origin and Evolution of Religion, p. 38.

are called Nāgakals. They are votive gifts from women desiring offsprings. In Mesopotamia this device appears on the sacrificial goblet of king Gudea of Lagash. In the words of Zimmer, "The motif must have diffused into India at an extreamely remote era before the arrival of Āryans."

There is an extravagance in India called "Snake-Love", which has been given a mystic religious interpretation still more extravagant. But the matter is perfectly simple. A snake-charmer must endure the bite of a poisonous snake. He does not extract the poison but accustoms himself to it by taking larger doses from time to time till the bite ceases to affect him. He even learns to depend on his daily "dope" like an opium on hashish victim and his love for the poison explains "snake-love".[13]

We may safely assume that Indian ophiolatry had its first cause in the dread inspired by this poisonous reptiles. But it is quite difficult to understand as to how this dangerous animal came to be looked upon as harbinger of prosperity. There is a wide spread belief that the serpents have power to remove barrenness. Virtually in the whole of India, the Nāga is worshipped upto the present day especially by women who are desirous of offspring. Nāga hero of Jātaka is worshipped by the wayfarers and villagers who crave sons. In the words of J. Auboyer,[14] "The Nāgas were sacred beings whom it was forbidden to touch, and whose complex characters made them equally feared and adored. Their aggressive tendencies were proverbal, and their vengeful spirit made them quite capable, supposedly, of exterminating an entire population, either by exuding the fatal poison contained in their fangs, or by suffocating their victims in their coils. They were capable of blinding people with their foul breath, or killing them with the fire of their glance : indeed their gaze was so powerful that it could easily reduce a whole town to ashes. Yet despite this, they were equally capable of coming to the aid of humans and could like the Yakṣas, make barren women fertile."

Serpent-worship through the Ages

Animals on the Indus valley seals show the importance which was paid to them. We can safely conclude that the animal

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13. Origin and Evolution of Religion, p. 38.
14. Daily life in Ancient India, pp. 155-156.

worship was quite common in the Harappā culture. But the most surprising thing in this connection is that no seal of Harappā culture contains the figure of a serpent. Crocodile is there but the serpent is missing. Of course both belong to the family of reptiles."[15]

Hymns of the Ṛigveda may be silent over serpent worship but Yajurveda and especially Atharvaveda definitely mention it. The same is true of later Vedic literature. It is important to note here that the mythic serpent-kings been personal names which are purely Āryan. The word Nāga is Indo-Germanic in its origin. Yajurveda pays homage to the serpents :

"Homage be to the snakes which so ever move along the earth. Which are in the sky and in heaven, homage be to those snakes, which are the arrows sorcerers and of tree-spirits, and which lie in holes, homage be to those snakes, which are in the brightness of heaven, which are in the rays of the sun, which have made their abodes in the waters, homage be to those snakes."[16]

Atharvaveda contains numerous interesting reference regarding serpents. Many of them are charms resorted to avert the danger of snakes. In the charm from the Atharvaveda, the serpents are twice invoked under the name of devajana.[17] The Grihyasūtras contain an account of "Sarpabali", which has the two-fold purpose of honouring and warding-off the serpents. The whole observance takes about four months. In Grihyasūtras, the divine snakes are divided into three groups pertaining to earth, sky and heaven.

An important legacy received by Indian art from its Vedic sources of life and literature includes the symbol of serpents also.

The great epic Mahābhārata is very rich in myths relating to Nāgas. It narrates how Kadru the wife of sage Kaśyapa became the mother of one thousand Nāgas, who became progenitors of the whole serpent race, Śeṣanāga was the eldest among the children

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15. B.C. Sinha, Serpent Worship in Ancient India, p. 17.
16. Maitrayaṇi-samhita, II. 7,15.
17. Atharvaveda, VI.56.

of Kadru. In the words of Fergusson[18], "When divested, however, of its poetic garb, and all its mythological rubbish, the story of Mahābhārata, in so for at least as serpent worship is concerned, does not seem difficult to understand..........." The hostility between the Garuḍa and the serpents is an important theme of the Mahābhāratata. The two-fold symbol of eagle and serpent outlasts the ages. Probably, the symbolism is much more older than the goblet of the ancient Sumerian king. According to H. Zimmer, the eagle represents a spiritual principle of the release from the bondage of matter. On the other hand the serpent's life-force is the sphere of life matter. In western tradition the spiritual antagonism of bird and serpent is commonly understood. But the opposition, as symbolized in India, is strictly that of the natural elements : sun force against the liquid energy of the earthly waters.

In the legends relating to the life of Buddha, serpents play an important part. Here they are serpent-demons generally represented as devout worshippers of Buddha. Nāgas are easily won by his word. There is a tradition that Nāgas also obtained a part of Buddha's relic. In the Jātaka stories, we meet with those pious Nāgas who realize the highest ideals of forbearance and self-sacrifice.

When Alexander was attacking some of the cities in India, he found in many of them a serpent which the Indians, regarded as sacred, kept in a cave and worshipped with much devotion. The Indians implored Alexander to let no one molest the animal, and he consented to this.

During the rule of the Kuṣāṇas Mathurā was an important centre of Nāga worship. Amongst the numerous Nāga images recovered in the Mathurā district the most valuable is the inscribed statue from Chhargaon. Modern images of Baldeo are nothing but imitations of the ancient Nāga figures. It is an important point to note that Baldeo is believed to be an incarnation of Śeṣa.

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[18] Tree and Serpent Worship, p. 59.

A highly artistic treatment of the Nāga figure is met in the Gupta period. Ajantā shows a Nāgarāja, distinguished by a seven-fold snake-hood, sitting in easy pose and attended by his consort. Among the famous frescoes of Ajantā, there are several representations of Nāgas. In the huge rock-carvings of Māmallapuram, we see a couple of serpent-demons wearing a snake hood. A beautiful relief in the temple of Deogarh displays Viṣṇu recumbent on the coils of Ananta.

The serpent worship remained in vogue during the mediaeval period. Snake-tailed Nāga remains a favourite subject in the mediaeval art The finest expression is found in the amorous Nāga couple. James Fergusson[19] observes, "......... the most recent example I am acquainted with of any great Nāga sculpture belonging to the classical age of Indian art, is the well-known bas-relief at Mahavellipore, on the Eastern shore, about forty miles of Madras, and executed apparently in the thirteenth century."

Serpent worship is still popular in the whole country. In the words of Vogel, "Now whereas genuine ophiolatry prevails upto the present day in Western and Southern India, it is found in Northern India only in the form of certain survivals." The great festival in the honour of the serpent is the Nāga-pañchami which is celebrated on the fifth day of the bright fortnight of the month of Śrāvaṇa. There may be some variation in the date and modes of observance, but Nāga-pañchami is celebrated throughout the whole country. "Thus it continues to testify to the feelings of awe and veneration which the serpent evokes in the minds of population since the earliest times we have cognizance of."

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[19] Tree and Serpent Worship, p. 68.

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Yaksas

General observation

The word yakṣa is for the first time found in the Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa where it means a "wondrous thing". In the sense of a "Spirit" they do not appear before the time of the Grihya Sūtras when they are invoked with a host of major and minor deities. In the Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa, Kubera, the king of the Yakṣas is a Rākṣasa and lord of robbers and evil-doers. Yakṣas are supposed to be lofty like a tree on whose branches spreading from the stern sit hosts of Devas. This was a grand conception symbolising the mysterious principle of life and creation. The yakṣa cult was a folk religion of the widest distribution which has come from the Ṛigveda to our own times, and was accepted as much by the Buddhists and by the Jainas and Brāhmaṇas. Indra, Mitra, Varuṇa of the Vedas and Buddha and Mahāvira of later times were compared to a yakṣa. Many yakṣa shrines are decribed in Jaina and Buddhist texts.[1]

Yakṣas as a class are much more familiar figures in the epics. According to the Mahābhārata men of Sāttvik class worship the gods, those of Rājasika class, yakṣas and Rākṣasas, those of Tāmasik class, Pretas and Bhūtas. Thus the Yakṣas are ranked below the Devas, but above the goblins and ghosts.

There is some confusion between Yakṣas and Rākṣasas, who according to one tradition have a common origin. Both have good and evil qualities. But according to Anand Coomarswamy[2] the two classes are not identical, and broadly speaking we find the

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1. V.S. Agrawala, Indian Art, p. 48.
2. Yakṣas, pp. 7-8

yakṣas associated with Kubera and the Rākṣasas with Rāvaṇa. Yakṣas as a rule are kindly, Rākṣasas blood thirsty. Yakṣas are not only the attendants, but also the bearer of thair lord Vaiśravaṇa. They play the part of supporters in all kinds of situation where their attitude is one of friendly service. Thus they bear the pavillion in which Bodhisattva descends to take incarnation in the womb of Māyā Devi. They support Kubera's flying palace and are designated Guhyas. Kubera is Guhyapati. In the case of Śiva, the Yakṣa vehicle in later images has come to be regarded as a demoniac symbol of spiritual darkness.

Yakṣas are supporters of buildings and superstructures. Thus the Chinese traveller Hiueu Tsang speaks of the Aśokan remains at Pātaliputra as having built by genii. Kubera himself can be regarded as the first smelter of gold. Yakṣas as garland-bearers are constantly represented in the early Indian art of Bharhuta, Sānchi and Gandhāra. Yakṣas are often called Devas in the Jaina books. They are usually guardian angels. In Buddhist works the Yakṣas are sometimes represented as teachers of good morals and as guardian spirits. In many cases Yakṣas have been human beings attached to the service of a community or individual, and reborn as a spirit, continue to watch over those whom they had formerly served. In a Jaina book, it is stated that as a general rule Yakṣas are reborn as man when their stock of merit is exhausted. Not only human beings, but even animals may be reborn as tutelary Yakṣas. At Bharhuta, Yakṣas appear as dwārapālas. Yakṣaṇis also appear on the pillars at the entrances. There is a key to understand the frequent representation of Yakṣas as dwārpālas. Anāthpindaka asks the Buddha how the Vihāra must be ornamented with paintings of sculptures. The Buddha answered, "On the outside door you must have figured a Yakṣa holding a club in his hand."

Buddhist tales provide a good material on the mentality and habits of Yakṣas. According to these accounts they preferred to choose their home in a forest, or in some lonely place on the outskirts of town or near the burial grounds. They settled down to found a family after marrying a dryad. Like ordinary mortals, they cherished their children and had friendly relations with other Yakṣas. But they also possessed chemies, chief among them were woodcutters and banyan trees. Banyans with their vast rooting branches destroyed all the neighbouring trees Woodcutters were equally dangerous. Though they warned the Yakṣa before cutting the tree. But the trouble was that they were really an integral part of the tree of their choice. It is for this reason that they preferred to live in sacred trees to be found in every town and village.

A big advantage for the Yakṣas to live in a sacred tree was that it provided an ideal observatory from which they could participate in everyday activities. People often came to consult them and they gave their opinions. The trees in cemeteries peopled by vultures and carrion-crows, also harboured Yakṣas. These contemplated the scenes of burials and witnessed the torturing of criminals, at the cost, sometimes of seeing their finest branches lopped of to serve as a stakes for impalement.

"The relationship between Yakṣas and human beings was based on a sort of mutual blackmail from which both parties derived equal benefit......... "The yakṣas granted them honour, prosperity and longevity. The yakṣas had a particular mission of making barren women fertile. To gratify them the trees were surrounded by wooden or stone barriers. An altar was also built nearby. The earth around the tree trunk was carefully cleaned. The villagers often came to hang garlands on the branches of the tree to gain the favour of the yakṣas. They sprinkled the trunk with sugared water, milk and honey. Cakes were offered on the altar and incense stick were left to smoulder. The presence of the yakṣas in trees was a guarantee for the prosperity of the village in which they lived. It was dangerous to neglect them, since they often stood guard over treasures, buried at the foot of their tree. If a satisfied customer failed to fulfil his promise, he may expect reprisals also.[3]

Kubera

Atharvaveda clearly refers to four Lokapāla gods. Amongst them one is Vaiśravaṇa Kubera popular amongst the common folk. From the point of iconography Kubera received the

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3. B.C. Sinha, Tree worship in Ancient India, pp. 54-55.

greatest attention. The formula comprised deformed-pot-bellied-corpulent body, mongoose or purse in hand, rich ornaments, smiling face and an open admittance to yakṣa figures. Sometimes later his images were transformed into those of an ideal god of wealth shown more or less a rich merchant prince of beautiful countenance. Lakṣmī and Hāriti became a part of Kubera cult.

The capital of Kubera is Alakā. It had Kalpavrikṣas from which the yakṣas and yakṣaṇis obtained all their desires. This was a link with the older Mithuna cult. We meet with the different elements of the Uttarkuru and Alakā fused together in the mythology of Vaiśravaṇa Kubera. Kubera has many beautiful palaces, groves and gardens on Mount Kailāsa. The city Alakā situated on the mount Kailāsa is a magnificent walled town, where dwell not only yakṣas, but also Kinnaras, Munis, Gandharvas and Rākṣasas. M. Goloubew has suggested, the whole of the ceiling of cave I at Ajantā may be regarded as a representation of the Paradise of Kubera. When Kubera repairs to a convention of the gods, he is accompanied by a great host of yakṣas. Kubera is a god of power and productivity, worshipped especially for treasure. Gaṇeśa is undoubtedly a yakṣa type, by his big belly and general character. But he is not cited by name in any list. Māṇibhadra is a yakṣaraja, and Kubera's chief attendant. He is invoked with Kubera as a patron of merchants. Gaṇeśa is actually equivalent to Kubera or Māṇibhadra.

Cult of yakṣa

In the words of V.S. Agrawala[4], ' Perhaps no other cult as ancient as widespread and as deeply ingrained in the lives of the people as the yakṣa cult. Even to-day each Indian village has a yakṣa shrine under the name of Bīr, and on inquiry it was found that yakṣa worship under different names is a living cult from Kashmir to Tamil land and from Assam to Saurashtra."

A yakṣa shrine is in the nature of a low platform on which conical aniconic image is placed. There are few differences between a Śiva Linga and a yakṣa shrine. There should be a yakṣa shrine in each village. The yakṣa image is single on its platform. A Śiva shrine may have other images also. There can be no niche for putting a lamp in a Śiva shrine. Lastly the yakṣa image is peaked at the top, while the Śiva Linga is rounded.

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[4] Indian Art, p. 114.

Purāṇas indicate that originally yakṣa cult prevailed widely, but it was supplanted by the Śiva cult. According to the Matsya Purāṇa the city was under the chieftainship of Harikeśava yakṣa who became a worshipper of Śiva and after his conversion, Śiva became the presiding deity of the city and yakṣas were relegated to a subordinate position. Even today there are several yakṣa shrines in Vārāṇasi including Lahurā Bīr and Bullā Bīr. In mediaeval India we come across numerous references to a group of fifty-two Bīrs of which several lists are preserved.

During the Gupta period yakṣa worship finds a prominent place. Kālidāsa has immortalised the yakṣas with Kubera as their king and Alakā as their capital. In Kuṣāṇa art we have hundreds of images at Mathurā representing yakṣa and Kubera with his consort. In the Śuṅga art also the yakṣa deity reigns supreme. V.S. Agrawala observes that the monumental stūpas of Bharhuta and Sānchi are dedications of a community devoted to the yakṣa deities both in male and female forms carved on the gateways and the railings. The higher religion of the Buddha and the popular cult of yakṣas were shaking hands and the people offered their homage to both of them. In the Mahābhārata Brahmā conferred on Kubera three boons: immortality, Lordship of wealth and sovereignty of the worlds. The Rāmāyaṇa mentions yakṣahood and immortal life as synonyms. The most important synonym of yakṣa was Brahman. The Mahābhārata refers to a yakṣa festival in which members of all the four varṇas took part in a festive mood. In the Matsya country, there used to be a big yakṣa festival which was supervised by the king himself. "From the earliest times yakṣa came to be associated with long life and wealth and it was an important factor in their cult becoming so popular." Belief in the death-conquering ability of the yakṣas was deep.

The cult of the yakṣa occupies an important place in the Atharva veda. It described a yakṣa abode as aparājita Brahma-puri. In the Ṛigveda yakṣa worship is mentioned but not as an approved way. The followers of Mitra and Varuṇa are desired to remain free from yakṣa influence. In one place Agni is said to be big enough to be even the lord of yakṣa. At one place he is requested not to visit the place of a yakṣa to which deluded persons were going. But there is one reference which shows that the yakṣas began to be associated with beautiful form. The Maruts have been compared to beautiful and benevolent yakṣas. This aspect of yakṣas found deeper roots in the Grihya Sūtras. The yakṣa cult gained strength during the period 1200 to 500 B.C. As a matter of fact the belief in yakṣas and Nāgas was rooted in the Indian soil.

Several important yakṣa shrines have been mentioned :

1. Yakṣa Śākya Vardhana at Kapilvastu,
2. Yakṣa Pūrṇabhadra at Champā,
3. Yakṣa Moggara-Pāṇi at Rājagrihya,
4. Yakṣaṇi shrine of Jarā at Rājagrihya,
5. Yakṣa in the gateway at Vaiśāli,
6. Yakṣa Suchiloma near Rājagrihya,
7. Yakṣa Māṇibhadra in Mithilā

Mahābhārata mentions that flowers offered to yakṣas, Gandharvas and Nāgas make glad the heart. Manu (XI, 96) says that meat and intoxicating drinks are the food of yakṣas, Rākṣasas and Piśāchas. In the Meghadūta (II, 3) yakṣas are described as drinking wine produced from Kalpa-tree, in the company of fair damsels. The prospector, before, digging for treasure in Northern India, makes offerings of meat, sesamum seeds and flowers to Kubera and Māṇibhadra etc. In connection with the yakṣaṇi shrine at Rājagrihya it is mentioned in Mahābhārata that there was daily service. The details of yakṣa worship included, music, dance, offering of lights, flowers and eatables etc.

Yakṣa-worship as a Bhākti cult

According to Ananda Coomarswami yakṣa worship are identical with Bhakti cults. "It is in fact, a great error to assume that the term Bhagavat applies only to Viṣṇu. The rise, or, as it would be better to say, the coming into prominence of Bhakti cults in the centuries immediately preceding the christian era was not an isolated sectarian development, but a general tendency. All forms of belief were involved, Buddhism no less than others."[5]

Not only is Vāsudeva styled Bhagavat but also the Four Great Kings, the Mahārājas, Regents of the Quarters, amongst whom is Kubera, Regent of the North. The Pawāyā image of the great yakṣa Māṇibhadra has a dedicatory inscription, in which the deity himself is styled Bhagavā and the members speak of themselves as Māṇibhadra Bhaktas.

In fact the yakṣa worship correspond with those of other Bhakti religions. The use of images in temples, the practice of prostration, the offering of the flowers, incence, food and clothes, the use of bells, the singing of hymns, all these are characteristic of Hindū worship even at the present day. Animal sacrifice and the use of strong liquors still persists in some Śākta cults.[6]

Yakṣa Images

As regards yakṣa images we find two equally strong traditions, viz. aniconic forms continuing up to now and the dominant sized images. The Atharvaveda had set a norm for these big images calling them yakṣam ātmanvat, the big bodied one. (A.V. 10.2.32). The epics have described yakṣas colosal in size, lofty like the palm, towering like a mountain, radiant like the sun and fire, death-conquering and of great physical strength. The available yakṣa images confirm this definition. They are most impressive by their size. From the point of view of art they appear as ancestors of the subsequent Bodhisattva, Buddha, Tīrthaṅkara and Viṣṇu images. According to V.S. Agrawala[7], "It is certain that the tradition of folk art had an independent

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5. A. Coomarswami, Yakṣas, p. 27.
6. Ibid, p. 28.
7. Indian Art, p. 118.

style of greater vitality than even the court art of the Mauryan times. Also the stone images of yakṣas may belong to the fourth-third centuries but iconographic idiom was of much greater antiquity, and rendered through the medium of clay, a feature surviving to our own times." The following yakṣa images are noteworthy :

1. Yakṣa statue from Parkham village in Mathurā.
2. Yakṣa from Baroda village in Mathurā.
3. Yakṣaṇi from Jhing ki Nagarā in Mathurā.
4. Yakṣa from Bharatpur.
5. Yakṣaṇi from Besnagar.
6. Yakṣa from Pawāyā.
7. Yakṣaṇi from Dīdārganj.
8. Yakṣa from Patna.
9. Trimukh yakṣa statue from Rājghāt, Vārāṇsi.
10. Yakṣa from Sopārā.
11. Yakṣa found at Bhilsa.
12. Several yakṣa statues found at Sisupālgarh in Orissa.
13. Yakṣa from Ahichchhatra.
14. Yakṣa images from Kurukṣetra.

A.K. Coomarswami, K.P. Jayaswal and Ram Prasad Chanda have taken part in the controversy regarding the proper identification of these images. Jayaswal was of the opinion that Parkham yakṣa represented the statue of Ajātśatru of the Śiśunāga dynasty. He read the name Kunika in the inscription on the Parkham image. Subsequently when two more yakṣa images were found at Pātaliputra Jayaswal identified them with two Nanda emperors. Ram Prasad Chanda objected to this view and held that these statues represented yakṣas and yakṣaṇis who were worshipped as a part of the folk cults prevalent in ancient India. Coomarswami was at first inclined to agree with Jayaswal but later on opined that these statues represent yakṣas and yakṣanis. He observed about the Parkham yakṣa, "In view of the recent criticism it is impossible to adhere to Jayaswal's view and it is necessary to revert to the opinion that the statue represents yakṣa and must date from third century B.C." Vogel has mentioned in the catalogue of the Mathurā Museum that the statue obtained in the Baredā village of Mathurā was also being worshipped under the name of Jakhaiyā.

Yakṣa images are distinguished by the following special features :

1. They are of colossal size with pronounced emphasis on muscular strength.
2. They are usually carved in the round.
3. The drappery consists of a turban on the head and upper scarf thrown on the shoulders and arms and a dhoti hanging below upto the ankles and fastened with a girdle.
4. The ornaments include heavy ear-rings, heavy torque, a flat trangular necklace and armlets with feathered projections.
5. There is a tendency to depict the figure as pot-bellied.

These images have a distinctive style which is the earliest in the history of Indian sculpture as known from historical sites. As regards their position in the evolution of Indian art it appears that they were most probably executed during the Mauryan period. "It was just the time when stone was being used for architecture and sculpture under the Mauryan emperors Chandragupta and Aśoka." With the making of these images a style of art became established. The yakṣa images found on the monuments of Bharhuta and Sānchi are the proof of the continuity of the yakṣa tradition.

We still find very big images made temporarily of earth and worshipped, both in North and South India. Thus the iconographic tradition of yakṣa figures have been preserved. In the words of V.S. Agrawala[8], "Wealth and immortality or long life were the two human factors which made yakṣa worship of irresistible appeal to the folk mind. Religion, literature and art all testify to the importance of this ancient cult." According to A.K. Coomarswami, we have recognized that all these yakṣas, are vegetation spirits directly controlling, and bestowing upon their Bhaktas, fertility and wealth.

The water Cosmology

Yakṣas have intimate connection with the waters. Kuber's inexhaustible treasuries are a lotus and a conch. Yakṣaṇis have a makara or other fish-tailed animal as their vehicle. The earliest mythology relates that the yakṣas control the rains. Varuṇa in the Atharvaveda is called a yakṣa. Thus yakṣas are the Lords of Life. They are deities closely connected with waters, though their habitat is terrestrial. These two essentials of their nature are inseparably connected. In the words of A.K. Coomarswami[9], "The fact is, that the yakṣas control, not so much the waters as mere waters, but that essence in the waters which is one with the sap in trees, with the seed in living beings."

Yakṣa cult is more mysterious and more powerful than the cult of the Nāga. It has often been referred to as a Life cult. A belief in the origin of life in the waters is common to many ancient cultures. This belief appears to be quite reasonable. According to A.K. Coomarswami plant style is actually nothing more nor less than the iconography of the water cosmology. "The water cosmology conceives of certain powers of abundance who direct, or at least symbolise or represent the operations of life as it wells upward from its source in the waters, and of a supreme deity, Varuṇa ; but in itself, it can scarcely be regarded as a theology, for it does not originally conceive of a personal consciousness underlying the creation of the world. "The Great Mother is also very closely connected with the waters and stand in close relation to the Water Cosmology.

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8. Indian Art, p. 118.
9. Yakṣas, part II, p. 14.

Yajurveda says, "Plants, O Ye mothers, I hail ye as goddesses." It will be found that the special formulae of the plant style are only explicable in the light of the innumerable passages in Vedic literature in which the Water Cosmology is referred to. In fact the Plant Style did not come into being for the first time about 200 B.C. ; but the Śuṅga reliefs are simply the oldest monuments we possess of what is really a very ancient style.

In vedic ritual there is an extensive use of vessels of water and this has survived up to the present day.

Mathurā as a Great Centre of Yakṣa-worship

Mathurā was one of the most important religious centres of ancient India. Here Brahmanism, Buddhism and Jainism had their respective places of pilgrimage. All the three inspired their own sculptures, images and shrines. The sculptors of Mathurā worked on a special variety of spotted red sandstone. The sculptures and images of Mathurā were supplied to distant centres like Sānchi, Sārnāth, Kauśāmbi, Śrāvasti, Punjāb, Rajasthan and Bengal. About five thousand of ancient relics have been found at Mathurā. A majority of them belongs to Kuṣāṇa period.

The artists of Mathurā had taken their cue from the master craftsmen of Bharhuta and Sānchi. They had adopted the ancient art traditions and motifs and developed a new technique. As a result the creative genius of Mathurā Masters proved to be one of the greatest school of Indian sculpture. The Mathurā craftsmen derived the fullest advantage from the traditional stock and added many new things of their own. "Nature is freely represented and partakes in a real manner of the joys and emotions of human beings. Decorative designs are also varied, some taken from the older stock and others improvised for the first time."[10]

Mathurā artists show better competence in the handling of human figure and take delight in representing the famale form in many new poses. The use of ornaments and drapery is kept at a minimum. Female beauty is one of the strongest points of Mathurā sculptures. The Mathurā masters were responsible for creating the Buddha image. They have also the credit of originating various images of Brahmanical gods and goddesses. As regards the Jaina sculpture Mathurā again holds an important place. The earliest Jaina stūpas and Tīrthaṇkara images have been found here. The traditional folk cult of Yakṣas has its fullest share in Mathurā religion and art. According to Jinaprabha Suri, it was believed that the Devanirmita Stūpa of Mathurā was erected by Kubera Yakṣaṇi in honour of the seventh pontiff Supārśva.

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[10] V.S. Agrawala, Indian Art, p. 216.

Mathurā yakṣa images of the colossal type deserve special attention. The Parkham Yakṣa is rightly spoken as the grand ancestor of all early Indian statuary. The standing Bodhisattva type was directly indebted to it. Both are free standing and carved in round. Both have a muscular built and divine character. Both have their right hand held in abhayamudrā. Coomarswami has very ably proved that the colossal standing Bodhisattvas in the Mathurā school were undoubtedly derived from the Parkham Yakṣa. Colossal yakṣa images like Parkham and Barodā clearly indicate that Mathurā was one of the most important centres of yakṣa worship.

During the Kuṣāṇa period the yakṣa tradition took a special turn in the form of the images of Kubera. Figures of Kubera are pot-bellied, having a plump face with long Moustaches and holding a purse and a wine-cup. Side by side with this purely Indian type of Dhanapati Kubera a new type of image was developed at Mathurā which has been styled as Bacchanalian groups. "It shows large block of stones carved on the two sides with group of figures in scenes of drinking and intoxication. Kubera is seated on rocky Kailāsa wearing dhoti. The first Bacchanalian group was found in 1836 by Colonel Stacy. "But the culmination was reached in the Bacchanalian group from Maholi exposed in 1938 showing a complete Indianisation of the entire subject carved on the two sides and also an aesthetic perfection in the true Mathurā style."

At Maholi the Bacchanalian Group was found in association with a colossal Bodhisattva which shows that such groups were welcomed in Buddhist environment. Images of Kubera with his consort Hāriti indicate that the worship of Kubera had become a regular cult as a benevolent deity offering wealth and Hariti as the presiding deity of children. The popularity of this cult has been strengthened by the discovery independent images of Kubera and Hāriti.

7

Worship of the Sun and the Moon

Introduction

Sun is a symbol of life. Its worship can be traced in India right from the beginning in the prehistoric period to the modern times. In the words of V.C. Srivastava[1], "The sun has attracted the attention of mankind for adoration all over the world from the very beginning of human history. It has attained the position of pre-eminence among the deities of nature in ancient times. The prominence and the glory of the solar orb, its beauty and splendour, its importance in creation and maintenence of life, its regularity in diffusing light and enlightening the whole earth, its primal role in the cosmic evolution and consequent mystery surrounding it, had secured for the sun a history of interest and importance equalled by none to which every age and every race has contributed its pages. It was this realization which led Sir William Jones, E.B. Taylor, W.T. Olcott and many others to suggest that one great fountain of all idolatory in the four quarters of the globe was the veneration paid by men to the sun."

The worship of the sun in particular belongs to the Persians, Egyptians, Amerinds and Dravidians, who regard the sun as a beneficent god. But the classical antiquity gives us little idea of the importance of sun worship, since neither Greeks nor Romans laid any stress on it. In Homer a very insignificant position is occupied by Helios. In the Appolo-cult of Greece, there is no real sun worship. In India the sun was worshipped from the earliest times under one form or the other and as late as tenth century of our era, there were six flourishing sects of the sun worshippers. In Persia the cult of the sun gave rise to that mystic religion known as Mithraism which at one time threatened the success of Christianity. In Babylon, Maxico and Peru, the worship of the sun absorves other cults. Here the sun was distinctly the genius of productivity. He is a royal god. Besides his power as fertilizer and sustainer he receives the added glory as ancestor of the king. In Egypt the king is identified with Ra. In Babylon the king represents Shamash and in Rome the emperor becomes an incarporation of Sol invictus. In the Chaldean system the sun occupied the central position among the seven circles of the sun. The other planets revolved round it. E.W. Hopkins[2] observes, "Philosophy finally separated the sun from reason and Christianity in the fourth century turned the day of the new sun into the birth day of Christ, while Sunday as first day, still represents the importance given to the sun in the astrological work." Instead of receiving the bloody sacrifices, as god of productivity, the sun is sometimes regarded as a gentle creator whose cult consists in harmless offerings of vegetables. There is a belief that after the sun as creator has done his work, there is no use to offer any sacrifice to him. Thus the Khonds of our country say, "In the beginning sun the great god of light, created a wife, the earth goddess. He is our chief god ; she was the orginator of evil. Hence we sacrifice to her not to him, for it is necessary to placate her alone. The sun is good, so he need not be placated; hence he receives from us no sacrifice, but we recognise him with a spring festival in his honour." In a like manner Oraons regard the sun as supreme god but they do not pray to him as he does no harm. Thus there are very few temples of Brahmā the creator. Man worships Viṣṇu as preserver and Śiva as destroyer. The sun is regarded as a moral guardian from the fact that he sees all things. Nothing can be hidden from him. In Egypt the sun is the first moral guardian of the world.

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[1] Sun-worship in Ancient India, p. preface, XI.

Sun-worship in the Vedic Period

The sun does not occupy a very prominent place in the liturgical forms of the Vedas. Agni far precedes him in dignity. During the Ṛigvedic times Varuṇa, Indra, Agni and Soma were supposed to be the major gods. In the words of Edward Moor[3], "The Sun, Sūrya or Sāvitri occupies a much less conspicuous place in Hindū

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2. Origin and Evolution of Religion, p. 60.
3. The Hindū Pantheon, p. 114.

worship than we should have anticipated from the visible magnificance of that luminary, and his adoration by neighbouring nations." In the first book of the Ṛigveda, only three Sūktas have been addressed to him and they do not convey any expressive acknowledgement of his supremacy. Only ten or twelve hymns have been addressed to this god and most of them being found in the first and the tenth books.

The theophanic moment of the sun is when he rises above the horizon. He is regarded as the eye of the Agni, Mitra and Varuṇa. In the great cosmogonic hymn[4] the sun is thought of as born from the eye of the world giant Puruṣa :

> The moon was generated from his mind,
> And from his eye the sun was born.

In the funeral hymn[5] the eye of the dead man is conceived as going to the sun. In one of the latest hymns to Sūrya in the Ṛigveda, there is a prayer for sight :

> 3. May Savitar the god, and may
> Parvata also give us light,
> May the creator give us sight.
>
> 4. Give sight unto our eye, give thou
> Our bodies sight that they may see;
> May we survey, discern this world.
>
> 5. Thus, Sūrya, may we look on thee,
> On thee most lovely to behold,
> See clearly with the eyes of man.

(Griffith's translation)

According to earlier hymns the function of the sun is to declare men guiltless. There is a reference to his healing activity also, who drives away diseases. Sūrya has a car drawn by seven horses. In fact it represents his rays of light. The sun as heavenly form of Agni dispels darkness and shines for all the world. Sūrya is the son of Dyaus, but many gods are said to have generated him to ascent the sky. He is once called " the divine priest of the gods, and the epithet Viśvakarman is applied to him. The sun's pathway was prepared by Varuṇa and the Āditayas. The sun protects the law of universe. In his obedience to law Sūrya is like Savitar.

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[4] Rigveda, X. 90, 13.
[5] Ibid. X. 16, 3.

Savitar

It is an important point to note that the different vedic sun-gods, Sūrya, Savitar, Viṣṇu, Puṣan, Vivasvant and Mitra represent a special aspect of the sun. In the opinion of H.D. Griswold[6], "An alternative view would be that each special sun-god was, in origin, the creation of different Vedic tribe, all of these being finally brought together within the Ṛigvedic pantheon as 'parallel forms' of the sun-god." Savitar, like Sūrya, is mentioned in ten or twelve hymns.

Savitar is connected with both evening and morning. It apparently refers to the period between sunset and sunrise. Savitar has been described with two arms. His two arms are the evening and morning glow. Savitar has golden arms and a golden car. His golden arms are very beautiful. With the evening flash he impels all creatures to go to sleep, and with the morning flush stirs them to awake and go to work. This Savitar is the lord of stimulation. The different forms of life are due to the ordinance of Savitar. He is once called Prajāpati. He bestows on men length of life. Upon the gods he bestowed immortality. In his own department Savitar is supreme. Here not even Indra, Rudra or the Ādityas can violate his independence[7]. The famous Sāvitri or Gāyatri stanza is the most sacred of all vedic stanzas :

That longed for glow of Savitar,
The heavenly one, may we obtain;
So may he stimulate our thoughts.

III. 62,10.

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6. The Religion of the Ṛigveda, p. 270.
7. I bid., p. 277.

Macdonell translates it as following :

May we attain that excellent
Glory of Savitar the god,
That he may stimulate our thoughts.

Here Savitar's power of stimulation is transferred to the spiritual world, and he becomes the inspirer of thought. He with his morning glow drives away the sorrows of the night and all bad dreams. As Soma exhilarates to holy thought and prayer, so does Savitar.

Progress of Sun-worship

The later Vedic age continued the worship of the sun under various names and subject. The later Saṁhitās, the Brāhmaṇas and the Upaniṣads provide us ample material for the history of sun worship in this age. During this period sun-god came to be identified with various rituals. The independent status of the god outside the vedic rituals is lost. Natural basis of the sun worship recedes in the background. The increased use of various solar symbol may be found in several Vedic rites.

The curative aspect of sun worship was fully developed during the later Vedic period. In the Atharvaveda the rising sun is worshipped to remove various diseases. In rhe Brāhmaṇas cure of eye-diseases is especially connected with sun-worship. The Pañchaviṁśa Brāhmaṇa observes that leprosy may be caused in the absence of Sūrya. The fertility aspect of sun-worship gets more emphasis in this age. In the Atharvaveda and Brāhmaṇas all the Solar gods have been associated with fertility and procreation. Āditya came to be a general name of the sun and the number of Ādityas swelled to twelve. These twelve Ādityas were the twelve months of the year. In the words of V.C. Srivastava, "The aniconic tradition of the Ṛigveda is continued in the later vedic age also but employment of symbols as sun-fetishes in Vedic rituals shows that the tradition of sun-worship has advanced a step forward from the purely aniconic tradition to the Semi-iconic stage as the Vimbas served as a temporary images of the sun in unconventional sense." A definite procedure for sun-worship became established.

The popularity of Sun-worship can be understood from the fact that the sun-god figures prominently in many sacrifices mentioned in the Brāhmaṇas. There are ample references to the supremacy of the sun-god in the Brāhmaṇas, Āraṇyakas and Upaniṣads. Even in the philosophical speculation Sun was regarded as the best manifestation of the supreme reality. Thus the later Vedic age witnessed important developments in the worship of the sun.

In the epic period Sun-god acquired a much loftier position than that ceded to him by the Vedic sages. In Rāmāyaṇa there is a hymn addressed to the Sun :

"The divine Agastya then beholding (Rāma) fatigued with the conflict, standing anxious in the battle, and in his front Rāvaṇa, who had drawn near to the combat, Agastya, joining the gods arrived to see the conflict, and coming near to Rāma he said: Rāma, Rāma, great armed, hear the eternal mysterious (prayer) by which, my son, continually muttering it—the holy Āditya—hridaya, which destroyed all enemies, brings victory, is undecaying, supreme, beneficant, the auspiciousness of all auspicious things, the destroyer of all sins, the allayer of anxieties and sorrows, the prolonger of life, the most excellent thou shalt conquer all the enemies in bettle. Worship the rising Vivaswat, the radiant sun adored by gods and Asuras, the lord of the world. For he possesses the essence of all the gods, is fiery, the producer of rays. He by his beams sustains the gods, the Asuras and the worlds. He is both Brahmā and Viṣṇu, Yama, Soma, and the lord of waters, the Pitris, Vasus, Sadyas, Asvins, Māya, Vāyu, Agni, the breath of creatures, the former of the seasons, the producer of light, Āditya, Sāvitri, Sūrya, moving in the sky, Puṣan, the radiant of golden hue, the shining, who has golden seed, the maker of the day. Worship with fixed mind this god of gods, the lord of the world. Having thrice muttered this (hymn) thou shalt conquer in battles; in this moment, O great armed, thou shalt slay Rāvaṇa. "Having thus spoken, Agastya went as he had come. After hearing this the vigorous Rāma became freed from grief, and with well-governed spirit, bore in his memory. Beholding the sun, and muttering this hymn, he attained the highest joy. Having thrice rinsed his mouth, and become pure, the hero took his bow. Beholding Rāvaṇa with gladdened spirit, he approached to vanquish him; and with great interestness became bent upon his slaughter. Then the Sun looking upon Rāma with rejoicing mind, exceedingly exulting, knowing the destruction of the chief of the Rākṣas and going into the midst of the gods, uttered the word 'speed'![8]"

The Āditya-hridya hymn of the Rāmāyaṇa fully endorses the existence of a Sun-sect in the epic age. There is directly a reference to a Sun-sect in the Mahābhārata. Three fectors were responsible for the evolution of Sun-sect :

1. The growth of Bhakti movement in the post-Vedic period.
2. Viṣṇu, the Sun-god of the Vedic tradition had strarted mixing with many solar-cults.
3. The cause of solar-sect gained momentum by the influx of Sun-worshipping Maga priests in India in the wake of Achaemenian invasion and popularisation of temples and images.

We are not in a position to give definite date for the origin of the Sun-sect. But on the evidence of the Mahābhārata the antiquity of the Sun-sect may be pushed back to 5th-4th century B.C. If the Magas entered India in the wake of Achaemenian invasion this date appears to be quite reasonable. The Mahābhārata relates that the Sun-worshippers were expert in the Vedic lore.

A most important development in Sun-worship during the epic period is humanisation of the Sun. Numerous references can be found of the Sun-god in human form in the Rāmāyaṇa and Mahābhārata. The depiction of the Sun in human form on Mauryan and Śuṅga terracottas as well as on the medallion of Bharhuta provide archaeological evidence for this new development. There is no evidence of image-worship upto second century B.C.

The Sun-cult was quite popular among the different classes of Indian society. Royal patronage was available to Sun-worshippers. Yudhisthira was a great devotee of the Sun. Rāma defeated Rāvaṇa only after reciting the Āditya-hridaya hymn. Of the foreigners the Sakas, the Indo-Greeks and the Kuṣāṇas were inclined to Sun-worship.

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[8] Hindū Pantheon, pp. 194-195.

During the Kuṣāṇa period, the Sun-image show Iranian features. But gradually there is nationalization of the Sun-images in the early Gupta period. Sun-images of the Kuṣāṇa period had high boots and a girdle round the waist. The employment of lotus is clearly seen in the Gupta cult. In the Kuṣāṇa period the Sun-images were of two types—seated and bhadrāsana. The Gupta art evolved a third variety also. It was the standing type of the Sun-images. In the words of V.C. Srivastava[9], "The Gupta period in its characteristic way of accomodation and synthesis evolved a neo-Sun-cult which imbibed within itself all these trends in such a manner that it looked as if there is no sharp break with the past while in reality it was a revolution without calamity because the revolutionary forces were accepted with grace thinking that they were inevitable, failure to recognise which would have meant a natural death." The symbolic worship of the Sun of the Vedic times was continued in this age. Solar symbols are found on the coins and there are numerous references in the Purāṇas. The chanting of Vedic hymn and throwing of oblations in the fire constituted the main elements of Sun-worship in the Smritis. There are many references of the Sun-cult in the early Purāṇas and inscriptions of the Gupta period. The Iranian tradition of Sun-worship also occupies an important place during this period. It is evident by Iranian features in the iconography of the Sun.

In the Gupta period there is exclusive emphasis on the benevolent aspect of the Sun-god. "The atmospheric Sun-god recedes in the background and a human Sun-god with a well-developed family and attendents comes into the forefront. The worship of the Sun by means of icons came to supersede symbolic form. The domestic worship of the Sun is replaced by public worship in temples."[10]

The Sun-cult spread throughout the whole country. Solar images have been found from the different parts of India. But as compared to Vaiṣṇavism and Śaivism it occupied a subordinate position and was regarded as a minor cult. We can safely say that the Gupta period gave a new life and vigour to the Sun-cult. It had paved the way for a full bloom of the cult in the Hindū mediaeval period.

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9. Sun-worship in Ancient India, p. 352-353.
10. Sun-worship in Ancient India, p. 353.

Hindū Mediaeval Age

This period was the richest as regards the Sun-worship in ancient India. The Purāṇas and the Upa-Purāṇas throw a flood of light on the cult of the Sun during the early mediaeval period. The literary works of the period contain numerous references to Sun-worship and it is supplemented by epigraphy, Sun-images and temples.

The Magian tradition of the Sun-cult was officially recognised by the orthodox Hindū society. Under the impect of this tradition the cult of the Sun attained its climax. Efforts are made to give national garb to Iranian features of the Sun-images. Thus indegenous features are employed to the full to overshadow the foreign influence. The concept of Surya is essentially human. The naturalistic tradition became a thing of the past now. The cult of the Sun develops all the characteristic features of a sect.

Many royal dynastics of the age patronised the Sun-cult. Puṣyabhuti dynasty of Thāneśwara was a great devotee of the Sun. Harṣa became a follower of Buddhism but he did not forget his ancestral deity. At the quinquennial assembly attended by the Chinese traveller the image of the Sun-god was installed together with Buddha and Śiva. Bāṇa the court poet of Harṣa has praised the Sun-god in a sectarian manner for the cure of leprosy. The cult of the Sun was quite popular in the post-Harṣa era. The proof is provided by the Shahpur and Deo-Barṇārk inscription of later Guptas. The tutelary deity of Pratihāra kings, Rāmbhadra and Vināyakapāla was Āditya.

Many Chāhmāna rulers gave patronage to the Sun-cult. Indrarāja Chāhmāna erected a Sun-temple at Ghoṇṭavarsika in 942 A.D. The Parmāra ruler Vikramsingha renovated a Sun-temple at Varman in 1299 A.D. The Gahaḍawāla rular Jayachanda granted many villages to the Sun-god named Lollārka. These are many references for the patronage of the Sun-cult by the early Gurjara dynasty. The Valabhi kings of Kāthiawār also patronised the Sun-cult. The king Lalitāditya of Kashmir paid his respect to the Sun-cult by erecting the famous temple of Mārtaṇḍa in Kashmir. The Rāṣtrakuta king, Govindarāja made a gift to the Sun-temple at Kari. The Sun-temple of Koṇārka was built during the regime of the Eastern Gaṅges of Orissa. Thus throughout the period under reference the royal patronage was available to the cult of the Sun from different parts of the country.

The Sun-worship was equally popular among the general masses. The Chinese traveller Hiuen-Tsang stated that the Sun-temple of Multan was visited by the people in large numbers. The Sun-temple at Bhinmāl was popular in the thirteenth century also. Two Kāyastha brothers of Mathurā gave an endowment for the maintenance of the employees of the temple in 1262 A.D. All these facts show that the worship of the Sun was a popular cult inwhich non-Brāhmaṇas also participated. According to G.H. Ojha, in Rajasthan there is no village in Sirohi state which has not either some Sun-temple or some broken images of the Sun-god. The Sun-worship in early mediaeval period became so powerful that it crossed the Indian borders and reached Indonesia.

The spirit of synthesis is further strengthened during the Hindū mediaeval period. It can be very well seen in the unique image of Sūrya with Śiva, Viṣṇu and Brahmā. Trimurti conception with Sūrya developed. The Sun-god replaces Brahmā in the trinity in an inscribed sculpture of Bengal. Trimurti Sūrya is found in Gujrat and Rajasthan. At Ellorā Sūrya is sculptured among the major gods. Many composite images have been found at Ranapur in which Śiva has been replaced by Sūrya. Sūrya replaces Viṣṇu in the tenth century Śiva-temple at Tejpur in Assam. In fact Sūrya is one of the five major gods of the early mediaeval period. In the words of V. Upadhyaya[11] the Sun-god "is next in populaity to that of Viṣṇu throughout Northern India during the period under review." According to Dasrath Sharma[12], "Whoever the supreme Head worshipped be, it is easy to think of Sun as his aspect, because as far as the earth is concerned, he is undoubtedly, the sustainer, the creator and perhaps also the destroyer."

Thus we see that the worship of the Sun is one of those faiths in India which originated in prehistoric period and continued its existence with vigour throughout the whole ancient times. The cheif reason for this unbroken continuity lies in the beneficent role

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11. The Socio-religious condition of North India, p. 255.
12. Rajasthan Through the Ages, p. 720.

of the Sun-god in everyday life. The Sun due to its benefic role has always been the object of veneration all over the world. To quote V.C. Srivastava[13], "It is accepted by scientists that solar phenomenon is the original source of energy. Even in the present atomic age the value of the solar phenomenon cannot be overemphasised. If the Sun remains as an object of worship in modern atomic age it would not be irrational and unscientific. Let science and religion meet in the Sun-cult and evolve a world of peace and prosperity."

Iconography of Sūrya

An early image of the Sun is depicted on a railing pillar at Bodh gayā. Sūrya is seated in a chariot drawn by four horses and he is dressed in a dhoti, scarf and turban. In the early Kuṣāṇa art Sūrya wears a coat and trousers. This form of Sun was imported from Iran by the Scythians. The worship of the Sun-god Mitra later on Mihira, was very popular in the Iranian religion. Mihira was worshipped by the Parthians also. In the Kuṣāṇa period the elements of solar iconography are as follows:

1. Sūrya is represented like a Kuṣāṇa emperor wearing the Northern dress consisting of a turban, coat fastened with a belt, trousers and boots.
2. He is seated with legs suspended from his seat.
3. He holds in the right hand a flower and in left hand broad bladed dagger.
4. He is seated in a chariot drawn by two horses; the number of horses later being increased to four and lastly to seven.

In the Gupta period the dagger was replaced by a lotus and become a standard type from the Gupta period onwards for all the Sūrya images that were made. Another special feature of Sūrya images during this period was the representation of his two attendants on each side, viz. Danda and Pingala. Pingala is holding a pen and ink-pot and Danda holding a staff in his hand.

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[13] Sun-worship in Ancient India, pp. 364-365.

The Sect of Sauras

The Sun as the orb that is seen in the sky, was a Vedic deity. It is quite quite reasonable to expect that the worship of such a deity should not become obsolete, since the orb of the Sun is daily seen in the sky. In the Ṛigveda the singer wishes the rising sun to declare him sinless. In the words of R.G. Bhandarkar,[14] "This idea probobly arose from the fact that the rising sun by his bright light discloses everything that has been done in the darkness of the previous night, and thence it develcped into a belief that the Sun destroys sins. Kauṣitaki is represented to have worshipped the Sun for the removal of his sins. Āśvalāyana directs that, while adoring the morning twilight, one facing the east should repeat the Gāyatri-Mantra till the whole disc of the Sun has risen, and in the evening with his face towards the west till the whole has gone down and the stars have begun to appear. In the Upanayana ceremony, when the boy is invested with the sacred thread, he is asked to look at the orb of the Sun and the preceptor prays, "Oh god Savitar, this is thy student, protect him. May he not die." Khādira[15] suggests the worship of the Sun for the enjoyment of riches and for the attainment of fame. Yudhisthira chanted the hymn addressed to the Sun and obtained a vessel for the production of all the food wanted by him, his family and followers.

In the seventh century A.D. Mayūra composed a hundred stanzas to get relief from the white leprosy from which he suffered. In the Māltimādhava of Bhavabhuti, the Sūtradhāra offer prayers to the rising Sun to remove all his sins and bestow holy blessings on him. "Thus the Sun has been adored since the Vedic times for the removal of sins, and the bestowal of riches, food, fame, health and other blessings. At the present day twelve prostration are made to Sūrya by repeating twelve of his names, all of which have a sanskrit etymology, and there is no foreign look about them."

Due to this great importance of the Sun a school came into existence for the exclusive worship of the deity, The worshippers are known as Sauras. Anandagiri brings Śankara into contact with the followers of this sect at a place in the South. The name of the leader was Divākara. Sauras were a circular spot of red sandal on the forehead and bore red flowers. The essence of the doctrine as

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14. Vaiṣṇavism, Śaivism and Minor Religious Systems, p. 151.
15. Khādiragrihyasūtra, IV,1,14, and 23.

given by Divākara is that sun is the creator of the world. He is the soul of all moveable and immovable things. The Āditya is Brahman.

There are six classes of the devotees of the sun all bearing a mark made by red sandal, wearing a garland of red flowers, and repeating the formula of eight syllables. Some worship the orb of the Sun who has just risen as the creator-others worship the Sun on the meridian as the destroyer. Some adore the setting Sun as Viśṇu, the protector. There are some who resort to all the three Suns as a triple form. There is a section of Sauras who see the orb and worship it in sixteen ways. They dedicated all their actions to the god, and do not eat without seeing the orb. The worshippers of the sixth class imprint the orb on their forehead, arms and bosom. All these six classes have to repeat the same Mantra of eight syllables. The followers of this sect interpret various Vedic texts as setting forth the supremacy of their own god. Their conclusion is that all who desire emancipation should adore the Sun, should bear his mark on the body and mutter the Mantra.

There is a view that some foreign influence contributed to the growth of Sun-cult in Northern India. Varāhamihira tells us that the installation and consecration of the images and temples of the Sun should be caused to be made by the Magas. According to Varāhamira the Magas were the special priests of the Sun-god. There is a legend in Bhaviṣyapurāṇa which runs as follows :

'Sāmba, the son of Krișṇa by Jambavatī, constructed a temple of the Sun on the banks of Chandabhāgā, the modern Chenāb in the Punjab, and no local Brāhmaṇa would accept the office of a regular priest of the temple. He thereupon asked Gaurmukha, the priest of Ugarsena. He told him to get, Magas, who were special Sun-worshippers from Sākadvipa. Thereupon Sāmba went on the back of Garuḍa, his father's vehicle, to Sākadvipa, brought some Magas from it and installed them into the office of priests of the temple he had constructed." There is an interesting story about the origin of the Magas, who sprang from the Sun. Sujihva was a Brāhmaṇa of Mihira Gotra. He had a daughter named Nikșubhā, with whom the Sun fell in love. The Sun of these two was called Jaraśabda and from him sprang all Magas.

The Magas have long been known in the ancient history of India. There is an incription at Govindapur in the Gayā district dated Saka 1059, which tells that the Magas, who sprang from the Sun, were brought into the country by Sāmba. There are traces of Magas elsewhere. Alberuni, speaking of the Persians priests Magians, says that they existed in India and were called Magas. In the words of R.G. Bhandarkar[16], "The idea of locating them on a continent called 'Sākadvipa must have arisen from the fact that they were foreigners like the Sakas with whom the Indians had been familiar since the second or third century before the Christian era. Evidently then the worship of the Sun or Mihira-worship was brought into India by the old Persian priests Magi, but at whose instance and under what circumstances they came it is difficult to say." The Sun-temple at Chandrabhāgā was seen by the Chinese traveller Hiuen-Tsang. It existed till the seventeenth century, when it was finally destroyed by Aurangzeb.

It appears that the cult of Mihira originated in Persia, and extended upto Asia Minor and Rome. On the coins of Kaniṣka there occurs a figure with the name Mihira by its side. According to R.G. Bhandarkar, the cult of Sun must have Penetrated to India about the time of the Kuṣāṇa prince and the Multān temple must have been its original seat. An inscription at Mandsor the construction of a Sun-temple in 437 A.D. by a guild of weavers. There are many more evidences which testify to the existence of Sun-temples in different parts of the country. In the copper-plate grant Harṣavardhana, his father Prabhākarvardhana, his grandfather Ādityavardhana and his great-grandfather Rājyavardhana are all styled great devotees of the Sun. This shows that Sun-cult in the beginning of the sixth century was professed by great princes.

Worship of the Moon

Sun and Moon are two great symbols honoured from the Vedas till now. The two opposite principles of heat and cold are typified by them. The pair of Sūrya and Chandra are depicted in Gupta art and also in Sassanian Iran. In folk lore the motif is repeated and also depicted in folk art up to our own times under the name of Chandā-Sūraj. In the words of V.S. Agrawala[17], "The basal duality of the creative process appears as Sūrya and Chandra, the one changeless and eternal. resplendent with its own lustre, and the other waxing and waning with borrowed light, the former as the principle of Buddhi centred in the divine and the later of Manas pursuing the other."

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[16] Vaiṣṇavism, Ṣaivism and Minor Religious Systems, p. 154.

According to E.W. Hopkins[18] Moon-worship is a trait of African religion and is well known in the oldest religious literature of Egypt, Babylon, and India. In some cases it is probably older than Sun-worship for it belongs more to the hunting stage than to the agricultural, though the moon's influence on plant-life is also recognised. The literature of primitive agriculture teems with referenes to the effect of the moon on the growth of vegetables.

In magic, the moon is all important, particularly with women, who pay respect to the moon. The magic connected with the Moon-cult as a deity of the dead may have hindered its popularity as an object of religion, but probably the growth in civilization had a more powerful effect. Except in astrology, Moon-cults are of secondary importance and seem to have been left in the hands of women and magicians. In civilized communities, worship of the moon wanes rapidly and survives as a dummy for witch-practices and silly supestitions.

In ancient India women worshipped the Moon for children and today they worship the Moon that their children may escape disease and untimely death. In Northern India Karvā-Chauth is an important occasion for the worship of the Moon. In the month of Kārtika on the fourth day of dark night women especially worship the moon for the long life of their husbands. The other important occasion for Moon-worship is Sankaṭa-Chaturthi. It is for children. It is observed in the month of Māgh on the fourth day of the dark night.

The climate has something to do with the relative value of the Sun and Moon. The sun is more needed in colder Punjāb than in Bengal, where the moon is more worshipped. The Dravidians worship both Sun and Moon. Khonds regard the Sun as the supreme god. But the Santhāls worship neither sun nor moon. In central India Kurs worship the both gods. Besides other reasons for worshipping the moon, it is, in Hindū belief, the place where the spirits of the dead go for a time. It is an important point to note that worship of the Moon in India takes place rather on the new Moon day than on the full Moon day. Even the Buddhists worshipped the new Moon.

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[17] Indian Art, p. 48.
[18] Origin and Evolution of Religion, pp. 55-56.

Astrology made the Moon particularly revered. The Hindūs have a lunar Zodiac, divided into twenty-seven mansions, called Nakshatra ; and believed to have been so divided by Daksha, a mythological son of Brahmā. The twenty-seven Nakshatras are the daughters of Daksha and wives of Chandra. Of these wives Chandradeva has the greatest affection for Rohiṇi, the fourth daughter of Daksha, who on the complaint of the majority, cursed Chandra with a consumption that continued fifteen days; but on his due repentence, his strength and splendour were gradually restored. The meaning of this story of Śiva-Purāṇa is clear. The idea of a male and female Moon has given birth to many legends and allegories. The Moon is also supposed to be the offspring of the Sun. Another legend makes the Moon proceed from a flash of light emitted from the eye of Sage Atri which impregnated a goddess.

In the Hītopadeśa, the rabbit is mentioned as an emblem of Chandra. Wilkins says in a note that "the Hindū poets have imagined the Moon as a deity drawn by two antelopes, holding in his right hand a rabbit". Sir William Jones in his hymn to Sūrya addressed a verse to the Moon :

"Thou nectar-beaming Moon,
Regent of dewy night-
From you bright roe that in thy bossom sleeps
Fawns-poutted, Sasin hight
Wilt thou desert so soon
Thy night flowers pale, whom liquid odour steeps,
Burning in the darkest glade?
Will no loved name thy gentle mind persuade
Yet one short hour to shed the cooling stream?

But ah ! we court a passing dream !
Our prayers nor Indu, nor Himansu hears—
He fades, he disappears ;
Even Kaśyapa's gay daughters twinklind die,
And silence Lulls the sky,
Till chatacs twitter from the morning brake,
And sandal-breathing gales on beds of ether wake."

Colebroke says, "The Moon is named Sasin, from a fancied resemblance of its spots to a leveret." According to Hindū belief Amrita, the beverage of the gods is derived by Moon from the Sun. According to the Viṣṇu Purāṇa, "The radiant Sun supplies the Moon, when reduced by the draughts of the gods to a single Kāla, with a single ray; and in the same proportion as the ruler of the night is exhausted by the celestials, it is replenished by the Sun, the plunderer of the waters : for the gods, Maitreya, drink the nectar and ambrosia accumulated in the moon during half of the month, and from this being their food, they are immortal. Thirty-six thousand three hundred divinities drink the lunar ambrosia. In this manner the Moon, with a cooling rays nourished the gods in the light fortnight, the Pitris in the dark fortnight ; vegetables, with the cool nectary aqueous atoms it sheds upon them, ; and through their development it is sustains men, animals, and insects ; at the same time gratifying them by its radiance."[19]

The Soma as Moon

Soma is one of the most popular deities in the vedic hymns. In the words of T. Goldstucker[20], "Soma is in the Vedic hymns, the god who represents this plant, and one of the most popular deities of the Vedic religion." The reason for this popularity is because of the important part which the plant played in the great Vedic sacrifice. Its alcoholic and invigorating properties must have been a source of great attraction, which the sacrificer experienced when he drank it in the exercise of his function. The properties are constantly described in the hymns addressed to Soma. In some hymns, Soma is said to exhilarate Varuṇa, Mitra, Indra

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19. Quoted from "The Hindū Pantheon", p. 209.
20. Sanskrit and Culture, p. 29.

and other gods who take its juice. In a hymn the worshippers exclaim, "we have drunk the Soma ; we have become immortal. We have entered into light ; we have known the gods. What can an enemy now do to us, or what can the malice of any mortal effect?" In another hymn, the juice of Soma is said to possess immortality, medicine for the sick, and a remedy for blindness and lameness.

According to H.D. Griswold hymn X.119 is clearly a monologue in which someone, when exhilarated with Soma, boasts of his prowess. The hymn reads as follows :

> Thus even thus my purpose is to win a cow, to win a horse.
>
> Like violent winds the draughts I drink have lifted and transported me.
>
> As the swift horse move the car, so have the draughts excited me.
>
> To me has come the hymn of praise, like lowing cow to darling calf.
>
> As carpenter a chariot-seat, so with my heart I frame the hymn.
>
> Not even as mote within the eye do the "five tribes" appear to me.
>
> The heavens and earth themselves are not the equal of even half of me.
>
> In greatness I surpass the sky, surpass also this spacious-earth.
>
> Hurrah ! let me deposit earth, and set it either here or there.
>
> In one brief moment will I smite this broad earth either here or there.
>
> One-half of me is the sky ; the other half I cause to trail.
>
> I am superlatively great, have been exalted to the skies.[21]

Thus with supernatural powers, Soma was gradually exalted as one of the most powerful gods. "He is the friend, helper and soul of Indra, he is slayer of cloud-demon Vritra, the destroyer

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21. Quoted from "The Religion of the Ṛigveda, p. 213.

of foes, the dispeller of darkness, the creator of the Sun, the upholder of the sky and the sustainer of the earth, the king of gods and men, he is thousand eyed, the most heroic of heroes ; he is wise, strong, energetic."[22] The prayers addressed to Soma are so mixed up with the description of the concrete plant and its juice that it is not easy to keep the two apart. In fact Soma is the defied sacrificial drink. Soma has sharp weapons and a car drawn by a team like Vāyu's. He rides on the same car as Indra and is called the best of charioteers. He is the slayer of the wicked and bestower of cows, horses, food and heroic sons. He comes to the sacrifice and receives offerings on the sacred grass.[23]

Soma is said to have been born as the lord of plants. He is the lord of the wood and has generated all plants. He is a king of rivers and king of Brāhmaṇas. In a few of the latest hymns of the Ṛigveda, Soma begins to be identified with the Moon. When the Ṛigveda refers to the waxing of Soma in heaven for immortality the description is applicable to the Moon. In the wedding hymn Soma is spoken as in the lap of the stars. In the Atharvaveda Soma several times means the Moon. The Brāhmaṇas regularly identify Soma with Moon. Because of this identification all the epithets of Soma such as Indu, Auṣadhipati, etc., are given to the Moon also. In the classical period of Hinduism, Soma ceases to be worshipped in the character which he has at the Vedic period. He then becames the god of the Moon. This transition from Soma the plant and its juice, to Soma, the Moon is apparently due to the belief, that Amrita, is guarded by the Moon. In Vedic hymns, Soma is frequently called as Amrita.

The myths connected with Soma the Moon are completely different from those relating to the Vedic Soma. As Moon he was born from the eyes of Atri, a son of Brahmā, became installed as the sovereign of plants, Brāhmaṇas and planets. But after he had acquired a vast dominion, he became arrrogant and licentious, and carried off Tārā the wife of Vrihaspati. Vrihaspati seeking to recover his bride, and some of the gods siding with him, and

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22. Sanskrit and Culture, p. 29.
23. B.C. Sinha, Tree Worship in Ancient India, p. 39.

others with Soma, a war broke out, which ended in Tārā's being restored to her husband. The result of her stay with Soma was the birth of a son named Budha, who became the ancestor of the lunar dynasty of kings.

8

Siva the Symbol of Happiness

Śiva is the name of the third god of Hindū triad, in which he represents the principle of destruction. The worshippers of Śiva assign to him the first place in the Trimurti. To them he is not only the chief deity, but the deity, which comprises in itself all other deities. In the Śiva-Purāṇa, he is addressed as Brahmā, Viṣṇu, Indra, Varuṇa, Sun, Moon, Earth, Fire, Water and Wind. Even in the Purāṇas relating to Viṣṇu, his power is exalted in praise and he is addressed with the utmost awe.[1] As the Vaiṣṇavas exalt Viṣṇu, so the Śaivas exalt Śiva. Śaivas hold that all things must, at the end of time suffer destruction, so the personification of that power must be considered as ultimately paramount. There is no doubt that he personifies destruction but indirectly it is reproduction. To destroy is therefore, to change or to reproduce. Here we see that the powers of Śiva and Brahmā have been confounded. Thus we can easily understand the deity of destruction to preside over generation. Absolute peace and happiness can be obtained only when we became one with Him.

In a trustworthy compendium of the Śaivite faith[2], attributes of Śiva have been described as follows :

"He has neither beginning nor end ; he is without outward form ; without passion or distinguishing mark ; he is possessed of all fullness, pervading all ; there is no God superior to him ; he passes the limits of thought or speech ; he is free from desire or hate and is the life of life. Possessed of attributed like these, he is the pure existence of an infinite nature."

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1. T. Goldstucker, Sanskrit and Culture, p. 51.
2. Saiva Samya Vināvidei, Qest.2.4. (Translated by T. Foulkes).

"He assumed a concrete form that men might represent and worship him. He embodied his divine grace in the great Śakti and placed her at his left side; and thus he reigns the lord Kailāsam. Further in order to perform threefold work of creation, preservation and destruction; he exists in the half forms of Brahmā, Viṣṇu and Rudra."

Śiva is represented as white in colour because he is besmeared with sacred ashes. According to Śaiva Samya Vināvidei, "The sacred ashes are formed naturally upon the fire-like body of Śiva and are then termed "eternal" or without beginning. When at the occurrences of a periodical destruction, he reduces all the gods and things animate and inanimate to ashes, he smears his person therewith. These ashes are called "originated" or those which have a beginning".

The consort of Śiva is Bhawāni, who is the symbol of created nature, and in that character named prakriti. As the deity presidingover generation, the symbol of Śiva is Linga. As the god of justice, he rides a bull, the symbol of divine justice. He has a third eye in his forehead. Serpents, the emblems of immortality are his constant attendants. Śiva seems most abundantly bedecked with them. He holds a trident in one hand and Pāśa in the other. Pāśa is a rope, often seen in the hands of Kāli for binding and strangling the cruel offenders. Śiva bears a crescent on his forehead. His pendent collar of human heads marks his character of destruction. From each of his numerous attributes he derives a name. He has five heads. Hence his name is Panchānana. Because of his three eyes he is known as Trinetra. On his head he carries the Gangā, so he is Gangādhara. As the destroyer of world his name is Kāla. One of his representations is half-male and half-female, hence his name is Ardhnāriśwar. Śiva is the patron of dancer, and is called Natarāja. Because of crescent on his forehead he is called, Saśin also. His other pricnipal names are; Maheśa, Śaṅkara, Rudra and Mahādeo. Śiva, like Viṣṇu has a thousand names. But Hindū mythology knows properly speaking no incornations of Śiva.

Śiva resides on the mount Kailāsa. His principal wife is Umā. His sons are Gaṇeśa and Kārtikeya. One of his principal attendent is Tandu, who is regarded to be one of the original teachers of the arts of dancing and mimicry. Besides Tandu he has a host of other attendants and companions, together with the demons and other beings. Umā the principal consort of Śiva is the daughter of Mount Himālaya. Her names are Pārvati, Haimati and Girijā also. Devi Umā is worshipped in various parts of India—particularly in Bengal. According to some Purāṇas, Umā was in a former life Sati, the daughter of Dakṣa. But it was a Umā that she bore children to her husbands, viz., Gaṇeśa, the god of wisdom and Kārttikeya, the god of war.

The Śaivas place the source of the Gangā in Śiva's hair, but the Vaiṣṇavas assert that the river flowed originally out of Vaikunṭha, from the foot of Viṣṇu, and descending upon Kailāsa, fell on the head of Śiva. In fact the two important sects of Hindūs are keen to attribute to their deity the superior power and might. So each is desirous of tracing its source to the head or foot of its own deity. It appears that generally the Śiva has the raputation of producing this river. There are fables in which the Gangā is made to flow from the fingers of Pārvati. Others make it arise from the feet of Brahmā. In the words of Edward Moor[3], "There is indeed no end to the legends connected with the origin, prayers and sanctity, of this divine stream."

"To Śiva are given three eyes, probably to denote his view of the three divisions of Time : the past, the present and future. A crescent on his forehead portrays the measure of time by the phases of the moon : a serpent forms a necklace, to denote the measure of time by years ; a second necklace, formed of human skulls, marks the lapse and revolution of ages, and the extinction and succession of the generation of mankind. He holds a trident, to show that the three great attributes are in him assembled and united ; in another hand is a kind of rattle, called Damru, shaped like an hour-glass, and I am inclined to think that it was really at first intended as such, since it agrees with the character of the deity ; and a sand gheri is mentioned in the Śaśtra, as one of the modes of measuring time."[1]

Śiva as Mahā-Kāla is represented in the Caverns of Elephantā. He has eight arms. In one he holds a human figure ; in another

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3. The Hindū Pantheon, p. 27.
4. Ibid., p. 33.

a sword, or sacrificial axe ; in the third he holds a basin of blood, and with a fourth he rings over it the sacrificial bell. Two other arms are broken off ; with the two remaining, he is drawing behind him a veil, which extinguishes the sun and involves the whole universe in one undistinguished ruin.[5]

Śiva as Rudra

One of the principal names of Śiva is Rudra also. In the hymns of the Ṛigveda this god is described as wise, bountiful and powerful. He is the strongest, most glorious of beings and lord of this world. He is unsurpassed as the father of the world. He is lord of the heroes, brilliant as the sun and terrible as a wild beast. He is identified with fire also. He is described as seated on a chariot ; as wielding the thunderbolt and armed with a bow and arrows. His shafts are discharged from the sky and traverse the earth. "He is called slayer of men ; his anger, ill-will, and destructive shafts are deprecated ; but he is also represented as benevolent ; as mild and easily invoked, beneficent, gracious ; as the cause of condition of health and prosperity to man and beast. He is frequently described as the possesser of healing remedies, and is once characterised as the greatest physicians."[6]

During the Ṛigvedic period Rudra was distinctly a subordinate god, being celebrated in only three entire hymns. Later on he became important as the Vedic anticipation of Śiva. In the words of Griswold,[7] "As the later Śiva with his phallic symbol is more like a Dravidian demon than an Āryan deva, so the Ṛigvedic Rudra is the most demonic of all the early gods. He may have absorbed aboriginal elements from the very beginning. Wiht Pūṣan alone he bears his hair braided, possibly a sign of Dāsa or Śūdra influence. Men so dreaded, the fearsome Rudra that the adjective Śiva 'auspicious' was attached to him as a euphemistic epithet."

The word Rudra apparently comes from the Sanskrit root 'rud' which means weep. The Purāṇas give an interesting story as to how Rudra received this name from Brahmā. When a youth Rudra

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5. Patterson, Asiatic Researches, Vol. VIII, p. 61.
6. The Hindū Pantheon, p. 50.
7. The Religion of the Ṛigveda, p. 293.

ran about crying aloud ; and when asked by Brahmā why he wept, replied that he wanted a name. Brahmā rejoined, "Rudra be thou name, be composed ; desist from tears. "The Viṣṇu Purāṇa relates," From Brahmā's forehead darkened with angry frowns, sprang Rudra radiant as noontide sun, fierce and of vast bulk, and of a figure which was half male and half female." Obeying the orders of Brahmā, Rudra became two-fold, disjoining his male and female natures. This male being he again divided into eleven persons, of whom some were agreeable, some hideous, some fierce, some mild ; and he multiplied his female figure manifold, of complexions black or white. Rudra is, in Vedic mythology, a collective name of the gods of tempest, or Māruts. Rudra in the singular being the name of their father. In later Purāṇic mythology, Rudra is the name of Śiva and the Rudras are his offspring.

The following prayer is addressed to Rudra[8] :

1. Let thy goodwill, sire of the Māruts, reach us ;
From the sun's sight remove us not, O Rudra.
In mercy may the hero, spare our horses ;
May we with offspring, Rudra be prolific.

2. Through those most wholesome remedies by thee given,
Rudra, I would attain a hundred winters.
Drive far away from us distress and hatred ;
Diseases drive away in all directions.

3. Of what is born thou art the best in glory,
Bolt-wielding Rudra, mightiest of the mighty.
Across distresses ferry us in safety,
Repell thou from us all attacks of mischief.

4. May we not anger thee, O mighty Rudra,
With worship poor, ill-praise, joint-invocation.
By remedies do thou raise up our heroes,
I hear thou art the best of all physicians.

5. Rudra invoked with gifts and invocations
I would propitiate with hymns and praises.

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[8] This translation has been adopted from the "Religion of the Ṛgveda" by Groswold.

Gracious, fair lipped, accessible, and ruddy,
May he subject us not to his fierce anger.

6. Me begging succour has the bull made happy,
By his puissant strength, he girt with Māruts,
Shade in the heat, as' twere, I would attain to,
Would join, uninjured, win the grace of Rudra.

7. Where is that gracious hand of thine, O Rudra,
Which is for us medicinal and cooling?
Bearer away of harm by gods inflicted,
Be thou, O Bull, compassionate to me ward.

8. I for the bull, the ruddy-brown and whitish,
Mightily voice a mighty panegyric.
Adore the radiant one with lowly worship,
We praise the name, the terrible name of Rudra.

9. With firm limbs, multiform, the strong, the ruddy,
Has decked himself with jewels bright and golden.
From Rudra this great universe's ruler,
Let not divine dominion ever vanish.

10. Worthy art thou that bearest bow and arrow,
And thine adorable all-coloured necklace,
Worthy art thou that wieldest all this terror,
There's nothing mightier than thou, O Rudra.

11. Praise him the famous, youthful, and car-seated,
Like dread beast pouncing on his prey, the mighty.
Be kind, when lauded, to the singer, Rudra,
Than us some other may thy missiles lay low.

12. Even as a son bows down in reverence lowly
What time his sire draws nigh with kindly greeting,
So praise I the true lord, who giveth richly ;
To us thou grantest remedies when lauded.

13. Your remedies, O Māruts, that are cleansing,
That are most wholesome, mighty ones, and helpful,
Those that our father Manu hath selected,
Those I desire, Yea Rudra's balm and healing.

14. May Rudra's missile turn aside and pass us,
May the vast ill-will of the pierce one spare us,
Relx thy bow-string for our liberal patrons,
O bounteous one, be kind to our descendants.

15. So, bull, that here art ruddy-brown and far-famed,
Since thou, O god, art neither wroth nor slayest,
To this our invocation be attentive.
We would with strong sons peak aloud at worship.

Thus we see that diverse elements have been brought under the name of Rudra. Besides his maleficent character, he is appealed to as a god of grace. He is besought to avert the danger of gods. The characters ascribed to Rudra in the hymns of the Ṛigveda are frequently indefinite. Numerous vague epithets applied to him would not allow us to fix a particular sphere of his operation. According to Edward Moor[9]," It appears that in these passages Rudra has no very clearly defined function, as an agent in producing the great phenomena of the physical world."

According to Whitney Śiva is a god unknown to Vedas, yet his name is a word of frequent occurrence in the hymns; but means simply propitious, and not even in the Atharvaveda is it the epithet of a peculiar divinity. Yet there is a side of the Vedic expression of Rudra by which he is connected with the more modern Śiva. "Though he is frequently supplicated to bestow prosperity, and though he is constantly addressed as the possessor of healing remedies, he is particularly regarded as a malevolent deity, whose destructive shafts, the source of disease and death to man and beast, the worshipper strives by his intreaties to avert. It will be apparent that the elder Rudra, though different in many respects from the later Mahādeo is yet like him a terrible and destructive deity." Instead of remaining a subordinate god Rudra in the form of Śiva became one of the most powerful gods in the epic legends. And now together with Viṣṇu he engrossed the almost exclusive worship of the Brahmanical world.

Principal Achievements of Śiva

Many legends connected with Śiva are given in the Śivapurāṇa. It is difficult to narrate them all here in a short space, but mention must be made of the principal achievements of Lord Śiva.

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[9] Hindū Pantheon, p. 50.

One major event of his life is the conflict with the god Brahmā, who was originally possessed of five heads. Once Brahmā addressed Śiva with disrespect and challenged his powers. Śiva was greatly annoyed and cut off the fifth head.

A similar penality was imposed on Dakṣa, his father-in-law. As the tradition goes, Dakṣa, once performed a great sacrifice. He did not invite his daugter Sati nor her husband Śiva. But both of them decided to attend the sacrifice. So they reached the spot of sacrifice. Sati met a offending reception from his father-in-law. So, she threw herself into the sacrificial flames. Śiva was so enraged that he cut off the head of Dakṣa. Dakṣa would have remained headless, had not the gods interfered in his favour. They prayed Śiva and the lord was kind enough to replace the head of Dakṣa by that of a ram.

At one time Kāma, the god of love undertook to excite the desire of Śiva to procreate a son. But the time was wrong. Śiva was engaged in fierce austerities. So god Kāma was reduced to ashes. Besides these feats, Śiva killed several demons including Tripurāsura.

Tripurāsura was excessively ambitious and oppressive Daitya. By his penances and austerities he forced Brahmā to promise him any boon he demanded. The demand by Tripurāsura was, that he would be unrivalled in strength and that nobody should be able to kill him but that of a Mahādeo. The demon knew that Śiva being a perfect yogi would not produce any son. The Daitya became so arrogant that Indra was forced to give him his eight-headed horse. Kubera gave up his thousand sea-horses. The Rishis were compelled to grant their cow Kāmdhenu. The sun in dread gave no heat and the moon in terror remained always at full. The winds blew as he dictated.

Now Indra persuaded Kāma that he should, manage such as Pārvati should be seen by Śiva while engaged in the graceful act of gathering flowers. Kāma accompanied by his wife, Rati and friend Vasanta, took his aim and launched an arrow at Śiva. But poor Kāma was reduced to ashes. However by ardent devotion and austerities, Pārvati propitiated Śiva and he consented to espouse his devotee. The wedding was attended by all the gods and demi gods. For some time there was no issue of the marriage. Disappointed Devatās renewed their request before Lord Śiva. Agni, the god of fire represented their case. He arrived in the presence of Mahādeo just when he had risen from the arms of Pārvati. Assuming the form of a dove, Agni received from Mahādeo the germ of Kārtikeya. He was not able to retain it and let it fall into Gangā. On the banks of Gangā arose a boy, beautiful as moon, and bright as the sun. He was Kārtikeya, the predicted destroyer of Tripurāsura. A terrible combat in due time ensued between them. It continued for ten days and ended in the death of the demon. The world was restored to tranquillity and order.

The Śiva Linga

Śiva has been depicted in Indian art from the Indus valley to our own times as an emblem or in human form. Both are deeply rooted in the metaphysical thought of the religious tradition of India. The folk-elements have been freely accepted but transformed. Sublimation of forms as a vehicle of ideas gives delight both to Indian seer and artist. Śiva is shown as Paśupati, Ardhanāriśvara, Natarāja, Kāmāntaka, Gangādhara, Nandiśvara, Yogeśvara, Harihara, Umāmeheśvara, Chandra Śekhara, Mrituñjaya and Jyotirlinga etc.[10]

There is a clear evidence of Śiva worship in the Indus valley. He is represented there in the form of Paśupati. It appears that the worship of Śiva continued as a wide spread cult throughout the whole country. Even in the Gandhāra, Bactria, Kapiśā and the region of the oxus Śiva worship was quite popular. Foucher has suggested that the Kuṣāṇas on their coming to India were converted to Śaivism. The figure of Śiva were shown on the Kuṣāṇa coins. We know from the coins of Vema—Kadaphises that he gave himself the title of Maheśvara. On all his coins Śiva or one of his emblems is depicted. In the Kuṣāṇa period Mathurā became an important centre of the Pāśupata cult of Śaivism. An inscription of the fourth century A.D. of the time of Chandra Gupta II refers to certain Pāśupata teachers who were tenth in descendance from the original founder of the sect who installed two Śiva-Lingas by the name of Upamiteśvara and Kapileśvara at Mathurā.

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[10] Indian Art, p. 6.

There is a legend that the gods, disgusted with Śiva due to his unrighteousness, punished him with the curse that he would be worshipped only in the form of a Linga. "Probably the immodest rituals practised by the aborigines had to be symbolised in a modified form and incorporated into Hinduism."[11] The worship of the phallic emblem in India was started by non-Āryans and was practised in many countries. In ancient Egypt the Phallus of Orisis was idolised. The Greeks copied this custom by venerating Priapus, derived from Apis, the bull god of Egypt. Mylitta was the goddess of fertility in ancient Babylon. The Romans called this phallic emblem Mutinus which was taken out in a grand processions with dancing and singing. Such reverence was common in France in eighth century A.D. and was current in Germany till the twelfth century.

In the earliest shrines of Śiva, the Linga was the only icon installed for worship. It was of a large size, made of stone. Śiva Lingas are classified in those made by man, and those that exist in nature. The natural Lingas are considered to be of divine origin. Traditionally, the most celebrated are the twelve Jyotirlingas, worshipped as luminous symbols of Śiva, at Somnāth, in Ujjain, Kedarnāth, Vārāṇśi, Rameśa and in some other parts of the country. In the words of V.S. Agrawala[12], "Jyotirlinga, the banner of light was an ancient symbol since Brahman and all the gods are Jyotiḥ, the ensign or Linga of the unmanifested essence of the Creator. Sūrya is the visible Jyotirlinga which stands in axial alignment with millions of other suns and is therefore, without measure at both its ends. The Māheśvara teachers made capital of this idea and it found a happy representation in art."

When the Lingas are of small size, they are known as Banalingas and worshipped by the people. The Lingas made by man have to be sculptured strictly according to rules. We find that

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11. D.R. Thapar, Icons in Bronze, p. 77.
12. Indian Art, p. 51.

Śiva Linga is represented in several forms as follows :

1. Plain Śiva Linga
2. Ekamukhi Śiva Linga
3. Pañchmukhi Śiva Linga.

The four faces are facing four directions and the fifth is on the top. Name of five faces are Sadyojāta, Vāmadeva, Aghora, Tatpuruṣa and Iśāna. The Lingas are made of stone or mortar and mounted on solid plinths which may be square, round or of other shapes. A Linga may be made of clay, earth, cooked rice, sand or flour as a temporary measure if required for an individual prayer. Those required for taking out procession are made from wood or metals.

Lingodbhava-Murti is a modification of the phallic emblem and is a common icon in South Indian temples. As the legend goes, once Brahmā and Viṣṇu were involved in a heated discussion regarding their supremacy over the other. Suddenly Śiva appeared before them as a blazing pillar of immeasurable size to subdue them. Being amazed, both the gods wanted to know the beginning and end of this column. Brahmā became a swan and flew upwards and Viṣṇu transformed himself into a boar to see its base. When both were not able to reach its limits, they felt subdued and offered their prayers to the pillar. In the Lingodbhava-Murti, Śiva is seen only from his knees upwards so that no one can measure his real height. Such images can be seen at Kanchipuram and Ellorā.

According to Edward Moor the worship of Śiva in the form of a Linga, is a remnant of the anti-Brahmanical religion of India. For such an opinion there are strong reasons. In fact the Linga has no natural alliance with the elemental worship of the Vedas. We can quote the following two references from the Ṛigveda:[13]

1. "May the glorious Indra triumph over hostile beings, let not those whose god is Śiśina approach our sacred ceremony."

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[13] Muir's Sanskrit Texts, IV, 345-346.

2. "Desiring to bestow strength in the struggle, that warrior (Indra) has besiezed inaccessible places, at the time when, irrestible, slaying those whose got is the Śiśina, he, by his force, conquered the riches of the city with a hundred gates."

The above passages bear a clear reference to the Linga as a deity worshipped by the pre-Āryan people who were at war with the Brāhmaṇas. But there are scholars who say that phallic worship among the pre-Āryan inhabitants of India is inconclusive. Sāyana, the commentator refers it simply to habitual unchastity.

In the Mahābhārata however there are several references to the Linga worship :

"We have not heard that the Linga of any other person is worshipped by the gods. Declare, if thou hast heard, what other being's except that of Maheśvara is now worshipped, or has formerly been worshipped by the gods? He whose Linga Brahmā and Viṣṇu and thou (Indra) with the deities continually worship, is therefore the most eminent. Since children bear neither the mark of lotus but are marked with the male and the female organs; therefore offspring is derived from Maheśvara. All women produced from the nature of Devi as their cause, are marked with the famale organ and all males are manifestly marked with the Linga of Hara. He who asserts any other cause than Iśvara or that there is any (female) not marked by Devi in the three worlds, including all things movable or immovable is pervaded by two bodies."[14]

The Uttar Kāṇḍa of the Rāmāyaṇa reveals that wherever Rāvaṇa went, a golden Linga was carried there. Placing the Linga in the midst of a pedastal of sand, he worshipped it with incense and flowers. On the basis of epics we can safely conclude that the Linga worship was quite popular before the commencement of the Christian era. Linga worship found its strong exponents in the Purāṇas. The Linga Purāṇa advocates the worship of Śiva in various forms but Linga holds a prominent place amongst them. At the time of Muslim invasion, Linga worship was common all over India. Principal Lingas were set up at widely distant places. One was situated at Somanāth in Gujrat. This was destroyed by Mahmud Ghaznaavi in the twelfth century A.D.

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[14] Quoted from Hindū Pantheon, p. 300.

Popularly, Śiva is said to be worshipped by a Linga existing only as an image in the mind. Any natural formation of earth or rock which approaches the Linga in resemblance is regarded with great veneration as Suyambhu Linga. "The mystery in which the real history of these emblems of native is veiled, renders it extremely difficult to give a clear account of the origin or tendency of the rites by which we see their votaries honour them......knowing, however so little of the genuine history of these rites and symbols, it is but a reasonable extension of charity to suppose that their origin was philosophical, though mysterious, and that their observance, although offensive, is not criminal."[15] The Linga is generally represented in mystical conjunction with both the yoni and Argha. The Argha in a circular from is called Patra. It is an attribute of Devi. In marriage and in funeral ceremonies, Argha is an indispensable utensil.

According to Swami Sivananda ji, Linga is certainly not the sex mark. To quote him, "The popular belief among foreigners is that the Śiva-Linga represents the phallus or the virile organ, the emblem of the generative power or principle in nature. This is not only a serious mistake, but a grave blunder. In the post-Vedic period, the Linga became symbolical of the generative power of Lord Śiva. Linga is the differentiating mark."[16] The Linga Purāṇa says:

Pradhanam Prakritim Tatcha Yadahur—Lingamuttamam

Gandhavarnara Saivhinam Sabda-Sparsadi—Varjitam.

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[15] Edward Moor, Hindū Pantheon, p. 301.

[16] All About Hinduism, p. 355.

(The foremost Linga which is primary and is devoid of smell, colour, taste, hearing, touch etc. is spoken of as Prakriti.)

In sanskrit Linga means a mark. It is a symbol which points to an inference. Giving examples Swami Sivanand ji says, "When you see a big flood in a river, you infer that there had been heavy rains the previous day. When you see smoke, you infer that there is fire. This vast world of countless forms is a Linga of the omnipotent Lord. ....Lord Śiva is really formless. He has no form of his own; and yet, all forms are His forms. All forms are pervaded by Lord Śiva. Every form is the form or Linga of Lord Śiva."[17]

According to Swami ji the Śiva-Linga has a mysterious power to induce concentration of the mind. The mind attains one-pointedness when it looks at the Linga. That is the reason why the ancient seers of India have prescribed Linga for being installed in the temples of Lord Śiva. To quote Swami ji again, "Linga is, only the outward symbol of the formless being, Lord Śiva, who is the indivisible, all pervading, eternal, auspicious, ever-pure, immortal essence of this vast universe, who is the undying soul seated in the chamber of your heart, who is your indweller, innermost self or Ātman and who is identical with the Supreme Brahman."[18]

Śiva-Icons

Śiva is the most powerful god of the trinity. His worshippers invoke him by a hundred names. As such he is represented in icons in all possible forms ranging from benevolence to malevolence. When in distress, the other two gods need his help they lend him some of their own powers and Śiva is then known as Mahādeo. Śiva has been depicted under twenty-five playful manifestations, or according to another tradition sixteen. Occasionally we find his expressive aspects as following:

1. The Beneficent Manifestation (Anugrahamurti)
2. The Destructive Manifestations (Saṁhāramurti)
3. The vagrant Mendicant (Bhikṣāṭanamurti)

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17. All About Hinduism, pp. 355-356.
18. Ibid., pp. 356-357.

4. The Lord of Dancers (Nrittamurti)
5. The Great Lord (Maheśamurti)
6. The God with the Moon in his hair (Chandra Śekhara)
7. The supporter of the Gangā (Gangādhara)
8. The Slayer of the Elephant-Demon (Gajasaṁhāra)
9. The consort of Umā and Father of Skanda (Somaskanda)
10. The Lord as half male and half woman (Ardhanāriśvara)
11. The Lord of the Mountain (Śikhareśvara)
12. The Lord of Physicians (Vaidyanātha)
13. The Destroyer of Time (Kālaśamhara)
14. The Lord of Cattle (Paśupati)
15. The Beneficent (Śaṅkara)
16. The Propitious (Śiva)
17. The Howler (Rudra)

The Śiva-murtis can be standing, sitting, or in dancing poses. They can be in yoga, benign or terrific forms. The man-like images of Śiva have certain distinctive features. He is the only god who has a third eye placed in the middle of the forehead. The story of its origin is that once Pārvati in a playful mood covered both the eyes of Lord Śiva. This resulted in complete darkness in the world. Śiva immediately produced a third eye in the middle of his forehead. It indicates his supernatural vision.

Śiva is generally seen with a tiger skin covering his loins, serpents encircling his body, and an antelope held in left hand. Śiva's special emblems are a battle axe, a trident and often a bowl of human skull or a garland of skulls. He has a Jatā-mukuṭa and wears the crescent moon as a part of his headdress. He has special armlets and bracelets to decorate his body. In his dances he may have more than four hands and is seen stamping with his foot the body of a demon.

The Śiva-murtis in yoga-mudrā are known as Dakṣina-murtis and are in a sitting posture. In Vyākhyāna-Dakṣiṇa-murtis, he is seated in restful pose carrying a Mālā in the right and lotus in the left hand. The position of the legs varies in three different varieties of this image. Śiva has been depicted as a great teacher of music in Viṇādhara-Dakṣiṇa-murti.

The benign forms in standing postures are known as Chandraśekhara murtis. They show him wearing the crescent moon in the middle of his forehead. These figures have three eyes and four hands decorated with usual ornaments. There are several varieties of such images as indicated below:

1. *Kevala-murti*

   It stands alone, erect with one bend, with his rear hands holding a battle-axe and an antelope while the front ones are in Abhaya and Varada mudrā.

2. *Umāsahita-murti*

   As the name indicates here Lord Śiva stands with Umā by his side. It may be a combined figure or two images placed together. Goddess Umā holds a lotus flower in one hand.

3. *Āliṅgana-murti*

   Śiva is seen embracing his consort with his front left hand. The Devi is having a flower in her right hand.

4. *Paśupata-murti*

   Śiva is seen here standing alone with a rosary and trident in his hands.

5. *Rudra-Paśupata-murti*

   It is not a very common image. Śiva is seen here in a serious mood. His hands carry a chisel, a sword, a half skull and a trident. He wears fewer ornaments and the sacred thread consists of serpents. This icon has very few worshippers.

In benign forms Lord Śiva is depicted in sitting postures also. These images have three eyes and four hands. The two upper hands carry the battle-axe and the antelope and the front ones are in Abhaya and Varada mudrā. Śiva has a handsome appearance in Sukhāsana. He is wearing all his usual ornaments. The following four varieties of Āsana-murtis are worth mentioning:

1. *Sukhāsana-murti*

   Here Śiva is sitting alone in Sukhāsana.

2. *Umāsahita-murti*

   Goddess Umā is seen here sitting to his left, with one leg folded and the other hanging down. She holds a lotus in her left hand.

3. *Soma-Skanda-murti*

   Lord Śiva and the Devi are seated as mentioned above but their young son Skanda stands on the plinth between them.

4. *Umā-Maheśvara-murti*

   The Lord is seated in Sukhāsana with the Devi sitting in his left thigh with her legs hanging down. This image is worshipped by husband and wife together. In this figure the Devi holds a flower in her left hand and the right hand is round the Lord's waist.

Although Śiva is a god of destruction, yet he bestows boons on his devotees. Several acts of his grace are depicted in sculptures. Such illustrations are known as Anugraha-murti. Once Chandeśa a young devotee of Śiva chopped off his father's leg when he kicked the Śiva-Linga. Śiva was so pleased that he appeared with his consort and embracec the boy. He decorated him with his own garland. This composition is known as Chandeśa-Anugraha-murti. Another Composition relates to an occasion when Viṣṇu had to seek the help of Śiva. This is known as Viṣṇu-Anugraha-murti and depicts the Lord seated with his consort and Viṣṇu standing in fornt of him with folded hands. He is receiving the Chakra from Śiva. Third variety is Rāvaṇa-Anugraha-murti. Another composition known as Kirit-Arjuna-murti shows Śiva handing over the bow and arrows to Arjuna. There are many more such compositios which show Śiva's act of kindness towards his devotees.

Icons of Śiva in terrific forms are known as Saṁhāra-murtis. Such images have a ferocious look with four or more hands carrying various weapons of destruction. He has several serpents encircling his body. Important images of this group are as follows:

1, *Kālahara-murti*

It illustrates a story when Lord Śiva saved the life of a young scholar Markaṇḍey. When Kāla appeared to claim his victim, Śiva prevented him from doing so. The composition shows the Lord with one foot resting on the plinth and the other raised high enough to kick Kāla on his chest. Kāla is seen with two arms. Below the outstretched leg of Śiva Markaṇḍey is kneeling in prayer.

2. *Kāmāntake-murti*

In this composition Śiva is seated in yogāsana. He is in angry mood. Kāma is seen lying dead. His consort, Rati is standing nearby with horrified look.

3. *Tripurāntaka-murti*

Śiva is shown as riding a chariot and killing three demons who had grown very powerful.

4. *Sarbhesa-murti*

Śiva is shown here in the form of a mythical animal with two head, two wings, the legs of a lion and sharp claws. In this form he tore Narsiṁha to pieces. According to a legend the Narsiṁha after killing the demon king, father of Prahlāda continued his terrifying activities. Lord Śiva had to destory him on the appeal of gods.

5. *Gajāsura-murti*

In this form Śiva killed the demon elephant. He is seen standing on the elephant's head. A small figure of Devi carrying her son is depicted to the left of the Lord.

6. *Virabhadra-murti*

When Pārvati became Sati, Śiva was enraged and transformed himself into a giant with several heads and many arms to destroy the sacrifice which his father-in-law was performing. He bears wooden sandals and carries a sword in one hand.

7. *Mahā-Kāla*

Śiva and his consort both have been shown in terrific forms. The image shows them standing and embracing each other. Śiva possesses four hands carrying his representative emblems.

8. *Bhairava*

Śiva has a dreadful appearance and bears a garland of skulls. He may have four, eight, twelve or more hands, each carrying a deadly weapon.

9. *Aghora-murti*

In this form Lord Śiva is standing with eight hands carrying a trident, a drum, a skull, a mace, a sword, a bow, some arrows and a noose of rope. He is in angry mood. Serpents are encircling the various parts of his body. All such images represent him as a great destroyer of enemies.

10. *Kaṅkāla-murti*

In these images Śiva is portrayed as a wandering mendicant, devoid of most of his ornaments. Serpents are encircling his body. He has four hands and bears a garland of skulls.

There are few other icons of Śiva which do not fit into any of the above groups. They are given below:

1. *Kalyāṇa-sundara-murti*

In such compositions Śiva is taking Pārvati's hand in marriage. He has four hands. Pārvati stands on his right but in some images she is seen standing to his left.

2. *Gaṅgādhara-murti*

It shows Śiva standing firmly on his right leg with his left leg slightly bent. His consort is standing on his left.

The Lord has three eyes and four arms. Goddess Gangā is seen descending from the heavens upon a lock of Śiva's mighty hair. The Devi looks agitated and is holding a lotus flower in her left hand. Various sages are observing the event.

3. *Ardhanārīśvara-murti*

It is a standing figure showing the right half as Śiva and the left half as Pārvati. The right half of Śiva shows Jata-mukuta with a crescent, his two arms, emblems and other ornaments. The left shows Pārvati having one or two arms. Several legends are connected with this murti. The popular theory is that on the request of Pārvati, Śiva conjoined her with his own body. In fact this icon symbolises the attempt to reconcile the worship of the Mother Goddess with the worship of Śiva.

4. *Harihara-murti*

In this composition right half is Śiva with his peculiar emblems and ornaments. The left half is Viṣṇu with his special emblems. This icon is related with a legend when Viṣṇu told many sages that he and Śiva were the same. It appears that these images symbolise a compromise between the two chief sects of Hindūs.

5. *Vriṣavāhana-murti*

Śiva is shown here standing with one of his hands on the head of Nandi with Pārvati nearby. In some figures he is riding the bull. In such icons Śiva may have two or four arms.

6. *Viṣaprahana-murti*

In this composition Śiva is drinking a cup of poison. Pārvati is standing nearby.

7. *Sadāśiva-murti*

It represents Śiva as super-god with five faces and ten hands. A fine sculpture of this form can be seen in one of the caves of Elephantā. According to the Śaivites, Śiva, though was the most important member of the Hindū Triad, was never considered as the Supreme Being. So the Lord was idolised as Supreme Being under the name of Sadāśiva. The image was further improved as Mahā-Sadāśiva-murti. Here the Lord is shown with twenty-five heads, fifty hands and seventy-five eyes. All types of weapon are carried in these hands.

8. *Trimurti*

Lord Śiva is depicted here as a deity responsibie for creation, preservation and destruction. This image can be seen in the main cave at Elephantā. There is a controversy about the correct nature of this figure. Some scholars hold that it is a combined figure of Brahmā, Viṣṇu and Maheśa while others opine that it is a triple manifestation of Śiva. To quore D.R. Thapar[19], "The correct name should be Maheśa-murti as all the three heads are of Śiva and none of Viṣṇu or Brahmā. All the three heads wear Jatā-mukuta which can only be worn by Śiva or Brahmā and not by Viṣṇu. Further Brahmā often bears a beard and is always seen with four heads. In other words it is a triple manifestation of Śiva and not a composite figure of the triad."

The Dance of Śiva

Lord Śiva as Natarāja is the king of dancers. Natarāja images of South India made of bronze are famous all over the world. "The worship of Natarāja is a special cult peculiar to South and the image casters of the Chola period devoted their special skill to create this masterpiece. Even today there are many icon-casters in the South busy turning out this image in hundreds, in copper and brass and then dipping them in chemicals to give them an appearance of an old bronze."[20]

There are many explanations regarding the origin of these dances. According to a Purāṇic version, once the gods became apprehensive to see that many sages by their meditation and severe austerities are defying their power and authority. Viṣṇu and Śiva decided to disturb their meditation. Viṣṇu transformed himself into a beautiful woman. Mohini and Śiva chased her. The sages were so captivated by Mohini's beauty that their meditation was lost. The sages were very much provoked and resolved to destroy the intruders. They by their supernatural powers created a tiger, a serpent, a demon and, the flames of a ferocious fire. But Lord Śiva conquered them all. He covered his nakedness by the tiger's skin and put the serpent round his neck. Holding the flame of the fire in his hand he crushed the demon under his feet and started dancing over its body.

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[19] Icons in Bronze, pp. 92-93.
[20] Ibid., p. 86.

According to Bharatanātya Śāstra one hundred and eight varieties of dances were performed by Śiva. Most of them have been depicted in the Natarāja temple at Chidambaram. Each dance-pose has an inscription which describes it. Works on iconography describe in detail only nine main varieties. The first variety is Ānandatāṇḍava. In this composition Śiva stands on the back of Apasamara ; his right leg slightly bent and left leg slightly raised. He wears a Jaṭā-mukuṭa and possesses four hands. The lord is standing in a graceful dance pose. He wears Makara-Kundals in his right ear and plain ones in the left. He is heavily decorated with ornaments. There is a serpent round his neck, another round his right arm and a cobra entwined in his hair. The whole figure is surrounded by an arch, showing small flames of fire around the edges.

The second variety is known as Tāṇḍava. In this form Śiva has ten hands carrying different weapons. The Lord is supposed to have performed this dance on the burning ghāts. The third variety is known as Nandanta. It does not differ much from the first variety. In this form the Lord is standing on his left with the right one raised. The fourth variety is also similar to the first variety except for the head ornamentation and hair style. In this hair flies in all directions.

The next four forms differ very slightly from the first one. Here Śiva stands on the demon with his left leg and his right leg is raised high. In the fifth variety the Lord has only two eyes and eight arms. In the sixth pose Śiva has two eyes and sixteen hands. In the seventh variety he has three eyes and eight arms. The eighth dance-pose is the same as the seventh except that the lord has only six hands.

The ninth style is quite different from the rest. In this composition Śiva has four hands and his usual emblems. There is no demon and he stands on a bare plinth. His left leg rests on the plinth. The right leg crosses below the knees and toe touches the plinth near the left boot.

Besides the above representations, there are some special dance poses. In the Swastikam pose there is no demon and Śiva has two legs slightly bent. Crossing each other they rest on the plinth. The Lord is shown here with eight hands. One of the right hands is in Kataka pose holding a lotus and one of the left hands is resting on the hip. In the Lalita dance-pose the Lord is standing on the left leg which is slightly bent. Right foot touches the plinth. He possesses eight hands. In the Lalita-Tilakam pose Śiva stands on his left leg on the demon Apasmara. Right leg is raised so high that it touches the forehead of the deity. He has sixteen hands, each carrying an emblem except the two at the top. This dance is known as Urdha-tāṇḍava also. In the Chatura dance-pose Śiva stands with his right leg on the top of the head of the demon, who is sitting on the ground. This pose requires a very careful balancing.

Symbolism of the Dance

In the words of H. Zimmer[21], "Dance is an ancient form of magic. The dancer becomes amplified into a being endowed with supra-normal powers. His personlity is transformed. Like yoga, the dance induces trance, ecstasy, the experience of the divine, the realization of one's own secret nature, and, finally mergence into the divine essence." In our country the dance has flourished side by with the severe austerities of the meditation grove. Śiva, therefore, the arch-yogi became the master of the dance. Zimmer further holds, "The dance is an act of creation. It brings about

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21. Myths and Symbols in Indian Art and Civilization, p. 151.

a new situation and summons into the dancer a new and higher personality. It has a cosmogonic function, in that it arouses dormant energies which then may shape the world on a universal scale. Śiva is the cosmic Dancer ; in his "Dancing Manifestations" he embodies in himself and simultaneously gives manifestation to Eternal Energy. The forces gathered and projected in his frantic, ever-enduring gyration, are the powers of the evolution, maintenance, and dissolution of the world. Nature and all its creatures are the effects of his eternal dance"[22]

Pantomimic dance is intended to transform the dancer into what he impersonates. The war-dance turns the warriors into fearless heroes. Hunting dance assures the success of hunting. Dancers mimic the gods of vegetation, sexuality and rain.

The "Dance of Śiva" is full of meanings. The drum in the upper right hand connotes sound, the vehicle of speech. The upper left hand in Ardhachandra-mudrā, bears on its palm a tongue of flame. Fire is the element of the destruction of the world. The second right hand in Abhaya-mudrā bestows peace and protection. The uplifted left foot signifies release and salvation of the devotee. Gajahasta-mudrā reminds us of Gaṇeśa, the remover of obstacles. The dwarfish demon is symbolic of man's ignorance. The ring of flames and light signify the energy of wisdom. It is the transcendental light of the knowledge of truth. Śiva's destruction is finally identical with release and there lies the eternal peace and happiness.

Śiva as the cosmic Dancer is the manifestation of eternal energy in its five activities ; creation, maintenance, destruction, concealment and favour. These five activities are symbolized in the positions of Lord's hands and feet. The upper three hands indicate, creation, maintenance and destruction. The planted foot is concealment and the uplifted foot indicates favour. The flying arms and legs and the swaying of Śiva's torso indicate the continuous creation and destruction of the universe.

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[22] Myths and Symbols.≡ Indian Art and Civilization, p. 152.

Śiva's tresses are long and matted. This is the hair of a yogi. It indicates the super-power which resides in such a wilderness of hair untouched by scissors. The celebrated strength of Samson resided in his uncut hair.

Śiva, in fact, is the personification of the Absolute, particularly in its dissolution of the universe. He combines two opposite things. He is a archetypal ascetic as well as a archetypal dancer. On the one hand he is a Total Tranquility and on the other hand he is a Total Activity. These aspects are the dual manifestations of an absolutely non-dual.

9

The Mother Goddess

The cult of the Mother goddess occupied an important place in the life of the ancient people. It can be safely presumed that the worship of ancient Mother goddess was common in almost all the protohistoric civilizations of the ancient days. She was known variously as Ishtar, Cybele, Nana and Anahita etc. Her worship was popular not only in ancient India but also in the ancient-most Iran.

The clay female figurines of Indus valley heavily adorned with ornaments have been identified as Mother goddess. On the head there is a high fan like projection. On the neck they wear a sort of broad band which covers the neck and part of the breasts. The braided locks and the ear-pendants are also indicated. Besides armlets figurines are seen wearing several necklaces, to the last of which several round or triangular pendents are hung. The wide triple girdle with a buckle device to secure it on the front emphasises the feminine character of the figure. The portion below the thigh is missing. The eyes are indicated by round pellets and the nose is long. The breasts are prominent swellings on the two sides of the necklaces. In the words of V.S. Agrawala[1], "There is no doubt that much thought has gone into the ornamentation of the figure and the whole atmosphere round it is that of a deity." In the Indus valley figurines we occasionally find an infant at her breast or on the hip pointing to her motherhood aspect. On a seal from Harappā a woman is represented with a plant coming out of her womb, a flamboyant symbol of fertility. The female figurines are generally undraped but in a couple of cases they wear a kilt-like skirt as worn by the early Sumerians and the proto-Elamites of Susa. The uniformity of style and similarity of ornamentation bring us to the conclusion that these were the religious figures related to cult worship of the goddess. Such female figurines have not been found only in the Indus valley and Baluchistan but they have been reported from Persia, Elam, Mesopotamia, Asia Minor, Crete, Cypress, Egypt and the Agean world. It should not be forgotten that the one important tradition which the Indus valley people transmitted to their successors is the wide-spread cult of the Mother goddess in the form of Śakti, Devi and Mātā etc. The figurines from the Indus valley are generally of a benevolent goddess, but the reverse of it is seen in the grim and terrifying figurines from Kulli. They could have been a Mother goddess like Kāli or Chandikā of later times.

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[1] Indian Art, p. 24.

"The fertility of the soil retained its commemorial association with the women who had been the tillers of the earth and were regarded as the depositors of agricultural magic."[2] The following beliefs are universal : women cause the fruits to multiply because they know how to produce children. Whatsoever is sown or planted by a pregnant women will grow and increase as the foetus in her womb. A sterile women is injurious to the garden, a barren women makes the field barren.[3] According to Starbuck,[4] "Female deities have often enjoyed the highest place among the gods. This depends upon the social organisation and the respect in which women are held. Clan life in which the mother is the head of the group is likely to lift the Mother Goddess into a supreme position." In the hunting society, hunting was the task of the man, while the women continued the work of food gathering. Hunting led to the domestication of animals which provided the basis for agriculture. Among the primitive agricultural society, the cult of the Mother Earth, conceived as a female deity became more prominent. The magical rites designed to secure the fertility of the field belonged to the special competence of the women who were the first cultivators of the soil and whose power of child-bearing had a sympathetic effect on the vegetative forces of the earth. Bernae[5] observes, "As grain gathering was women's business; agriculture was probably

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2. Briffault, The Mothers, p. 117.
3. N.N. Bhattacharya, Indian Mother Goddess, p. 4.
4. Starbuck, Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics, p. 828.
5. Science in History, p. 61.

women's invention, and in any case women's work, at least till the invention of the ox-drawn hoe or plough, for it was done with a hoe, a derivative of the stone age digging stick with which women used to grub for roots. Where agriculture predominated over hunting in providing food, it accordingly raised the status of the women and halted and reversed the tendency to change the reckoning of descent through the mother to that through the father which hunting first introduced. Only where stock raising predominated, as in the lands bordering the agriculture supplements, there was a complete transition to the patriarchy—as we see it in the Bible."

The cult of Indian Mother Goddess might have some bearing on the principle of mother-right. There is much to show that the Semites before their separation passed through a matriarchal form of society. There the principle of mother-right seems to have long survived in the sphere of religion. We may safely presume that in former times it was widely spread through Asia-Minor. Frazer shows that in Egypt the archaic system of mother-right lasted down to Roman times. In the cult of Mother goddess various practices and observances are symbolic to the negation of true marriage and obliteration of sex. Such stories of virgin Goddesses are relics of an age when the father had no significance at all, and of a society in which men's contribution to the matter of procreation was hardly recognised.[6] According to the Egyptian legends it was believed that agricultural civilizations had a female origin. As in Egypt we can see in Babylonia the early belief that the life in the universe had a female origin. "The worship of the Mother Earth which later developed into that of all-pervading Mother-Goddess was thus a feature of the agricultural civilizations."[7] The Vedic Āryans were worshippers of the father gods, but they could not annihilate the prevailing cult of the Mother-goddess and so the goddess Prithvi was allowed to remain in the Vedic pantheon. Many traits of later Hinduism, especially those like the cult of Mother Goddess are legacies of the Pre-Vedic Harappā culture.

The religion of the Mother Goddess existed in different parts of the world. All the principal types of Mother Goddess were found in South East Europe and the Aegean basin. Another

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6. Indian Mother-Goddess, p. 6.
7. Indian Mother-Goddess, p. 8.

important centre of Mother Goddess cult was Malta. The Cretan claim of being the breeding spot of the Great Mother Cybele cannot be lightly dismissed. The cult of Cybele, came to Rome in the beginning of the second century B.C. The earliest settlers of the Tigro-Euphrates valley were worshippers of the Earth-Mother. In Asia Minor before the settlements of the Hittites, a Mother Goddess was worshipped under various local names. The Hittites who brought with them a patriarchal system would not annihilate the spirit of Mother-worship. The Great Mother continued to be worshipped being the goddess of the land. In India the Vedas are not the effective source in which one may seek the origin of the idea of the Female-Principle, it has to be sought in the pre-Vedic tradition of the country.

Earth and Woman

"In the earliest phase of man's social existence his thought was conditioned by the urge to promote the propagation of his race and the production of crops."[8] In the words of Frazer,[9] "to live and to cause to live, to eat food and to beget children, these were the primary wants of man in the past, and they will be the primary wants of man in future so long as the world lasts." Peoples of the past unconsciously came to the conclusion that natural productivity should be viewed in terms of human productivity, earth-mother in terms of human mother. Briffault writes, "The identification of earth with women pervadas the thought of all stages of culture, and pages could be filled with illustrations of the universal equation." The mother and the soil are alike was a principle of Roman jurisprudence. In ancient India, at the marriage ceremony, the woman is called "a seed field". The belief has gone deep into the hearts of men that the mother's womb and the womb of the earth are forms of the same thing. The Vedic hymns clearly express that the earth is the mother of man. In the Persian religion man was created art of earth. In many savage cosmologies the first man arose out of the earth. The word Kṣetra applies to women in all cases. The great law giver of ancient India, Manu identified man with seed while woman with seed-field. This idea is found in most of the Purāṇas and the law books.

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8. Indian Mother Goddess, p. 15.
9. The Golden Bough, p. 5.

The identification of earth with women indicates that the function of the both are alike. A fertility ritual is observed by the Bengalee woman on and from the seventh day of the month of Jeyṣtha. They believe that, during the four day of the ritual Mother Earth menstruates in order to prepare herself for her fertilising work. During this period all the farm work is stopped. Since Earth is identified with woman, the conception of the menstruating Earth Goddess is quite natural. In the Panjāb, Mother Earth sleeps for a week in each month. In the Deccan, after the Navarātra, her temple is closed from the tenth to the full moon day when she takes rest. A similar rite of purification is observed in the case of goddess Bhagvati in Kerala. In the Malabar region, Mother Earth takes rest during the hot weather until she gets the first shower of rain. In many parts of India, great importance is attached to the menstruation of the goddess Pārvati. We must mention here about the menstruation of the goddess Kāmākhyā of Assam. Thomson[10] writes," In primitive thought, menstruation was regarded, quite correctly, as the process of the same nature as childbirth." In the Tāntric system special importance is attached to the menstrual blood. The Bhils before sowing set up a stone in the field and smear it with virmillion. The vermillion stands for menstrual blood. Most of the figurines of Mother Goddess from Indus valley culture are painted with a red wash. The relation between vermillion with the productive aspects of nature has been shown in detail by Robert Briffault. Red being the fertility symbol representing the menstrual blood is appropriate to the female figurines supposed to represent the Earth Goddess. In the words of Thomson[11], "It is a world-wide custom for menstruating or pregnant women to daub their bodies with red ochre, which serves at once to warn the men away and to enhance their fertility. In many marriage ceremonies the bride's forehead is painted red—a sign that she is forbidden to all men save her husband and a guarantee that she will bear him children." Married Hindū women use vermillion on their forehead. Widows and Virgins cannot use it because they are forbidden to procreate. The bones of upper palaeolithic and neolithic interments are found painted red. This wide spread custom has a ritual significance since red is the renewal of life. Thomson[12] says, "The symbolism become quite clear when we find, as we commonly do, that the skeleton has been laid in the contracted or uterine posture. Smeared with the colour of life, curled up like a babe in the womb—what more could the primitive man do to ensure that the soul of the departed would be born again."

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[10] Studies in Ancient Greek Society, p. 25.

[11] Studies in Ancient Greek History, p. 209.

Harappā Culture

Mother Goddess in Harappā culture is a symbol of earth. It is from the earth that grows the life-sustaining vegetables and other crops. We have already discussed about the figurines of Mother Goddess of Harappā culture in the forgone pages. The figurines of Mother Goddess have been found from Kulli and Zhob. Their fertility significance is beyond doubt. The Zhob figurines remind us of the Phigalian Demeter or the Black Annis. Piggot[13] observes, "a grim embodiment of the Mother Goddess who is also the guardian of the dead—an under-world deity connected alike with crops and seed-corn buried beneath the earth. The fertility aspect so often connected with such uuderworld gods is indeed represented by other models."

The terracotta figurines from Southern Sind are exactly like the specimens from Harappā and Mohenjo-daro. The figurines from Chanhu-daro are also of Mohenjo-daro type. The goddesses wear a distinctive head dress which rises from the back of the head. She is significantly nude except for a very short skirt round the waist secured by a girdle.

Vedic and Post-Vedic Period

Heaven and Earth are described in the Vedic literature as universal parents, but no cosmogonic importance is really attached to them. In the Atharvaveda there is a hymn dedicated to Mother Earth. In the Aitareya Brāhmaṇa we have description of the marriage of heaven and earth. The conception of a sky Father fertilising the Earth Mother is met with in a number of mythologies. In a Greek magic-formula of the first century A.D., the sky is invoked to rain and the earth to conceive and yield. For the first time in the Mahābhārata Mother Earth is brought into relation to Viṣṇu and in course of time she becomes his consort. It is said that when Mother Earth became burdened with excessive pressure of population, she sank down and sought the protection of Viṣṇu. Viṣṇu incarnated as boar lifted her to her own place. The association of Viṣṇu with Earth is found in many places. The early Chālukya kings, who claimed to be incarnation of Viṣṇu used the title Sri-Prithivi-Vallabha. The Earth called Vaiṣṇavi, was conceived as the wife of Viṣṇu in many land grants. In the Rāmāyaṇa Earth is designated as Medini, Mādhavi, Dharṇi etc. Sitā the wife of lord Rāma, is said to have sprung from Mother Earth and in the end she disappears again into her womb. In the hymns of the Vedas, Sitā is simply the furrow which bears crops for men. In the Arthaśāstra of Kauṭilya Sitā is regarded as residing in seeds and plants. Referring to the vegetative aspect of the Mother Goddess, the Harivaṁśa says that she is Sitā to the ploughmen. In a passage of the Markaṇḍeya Purāṇa the Devi says, "Next O ye gods, I shall support the whole world with life-sustaining vegetables which shall grow out of my own body during a period of heavy rain. I shall gain fame on earth then as Śākambhari." This goddess is no other than the Mother Earth. It is said that Devi Śākambhari nourished the whole earth during a period of drought which lasted for a hundred years.

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[12] Ibid., p. 210.
[13] Prehistoric India, p. 217.

Mother Goddess Ring-stones

As specimens of the earlier tradition of the worship of the Mother Goddess, a number of ring-stones have been found from Taxilā to Pātaliputra. They are of hardstone, with or without a hole in the centre and showing the Mother Goddess in various combinations. At times there are only plural geometrical patterns. Few specimens of the Mother Goddess ring-stones are as follows:

1. A ring-stone from Mathurā, showing an eight petalled lotus in the centre from which four stalks shoot out in four directions, showing on the terminal female figures in dancing hand pose.

2. Fragment of a ring-stone from Kosam, showing an outer and inner bands of rossette-flowers.

3. A ring-stone from Rājghāt, showing three Mother Goddesses alternating with three linga symbols flanked by two cobras.

4. A ring-stone from Taxilā having a central hole and three nude figures of the Mother Goddess; showing flames of fire enkindled in an alter, flanked by two cobras.

5. One ring-stone from Basārh.

6. One ring stone from Saṅkisa with three Mother Goddesses, three fan-palms and three taurines. The second and third zones consist of the dog-tooth design.

7. A ring-stone from Patna city showing a fifteen petalled lotus flower in the centre encircled by a beautiful garland of forty-eight taurines.

Recently few more ring-stones have been found from different places. The essential features remain the same. Generally the ring-stones contain the figures of nude Mother Goddesses. The other features are figures of palm tree and animals of wide variety. The palm tree is often repeated with the Goddess which emphasises its intimate relation with the cult. We often find certain patterns of central lotus, rayed solar orb, honey-suckle, trangles, taurines and crescents etc. To quote V.S. Agrawala, "The cult character based on an underlying unity of the deity is undoubted."

The name of the Mother Goddess and the cult in Indian tradition is Sri-Chakra also called Śri-yantra in later tradition. The Śri-Chakra being aniconic representation of the Mother Goddess is worshipped both in human and symbolical form up to this day. A commentary on the nature of the cult is available in the Śri Sūkta at the end of the fifth Maṅdala of the Ṛigveda. The goddess is there identified with earth and conceived of as the mother of all creatures. She is born from the waters from which her lotus takes root. Her devotees in the cult were known as Śri-Kāma for whom she was goddess of prosperity and fertility. Animals on the disc are included amongst her gifts. She is the giver of all food. "That which is under the influence of the Goddess within the orbit of her Chakra is full of abundance, prosperity, longevity and progeny.

John Marshall, making a probe into the meaning of the ring-stones, says, "It could hardly have been utilitarian, nor are they suited for personal ornaments. The nude figures engraved on them appear to represent a Goddess of fertility, perhaps the Earth Goddess, Prithivi, and they point to the disc having served as votive offerings. The earth itself, it may be recalled, was conceived of as wheel shaped in the Ṛigveda, and is said to be circular in the Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa. With these may be compared a seal from Harappā exhibiting the Goddess of Fertility with her legs wide apart, but portrayed upside down, with a plant issuing from her womb. These figures of the Fertility Goddess are particularly significant, because the form of the ring-stones from Taxilā to Kosam also call to mind the peculiar ring-stones form Harappā and Mohenjodaro."

Worship of the Mother Goddess

In the words of N.N. Bhattacharya,[15] "In every primitive agricultural community, the Earth is propitiated with sacrifices and magical rites. The cult of Earth is recalled in the present Indian marriage rituals and she is also worshipped as a household goddess. Bhumi or the Earth has always a place in village cults and to this divinity are offered cakes, sweetmeats and fruits." The worship of the Mother Goddess assumes varied forms. People in India have a strong faith in the sanctity of the Earth Mother. She is supposed to possess mystic powers and is regarded as a remedy for disease. There is a widespread belief that man can derive strength from the touch of Mother Earth. But the Earth is worshipped chiefly in connection with agricultural seasons. Sacrifices are offered to please her. The Oraon farmer, before transplanting his rice seedlings offers wine to the Mother Earth and Oraon girls, at the time of sowing pat the Earth to render her fertile. In Hoshangabad, after the sowing is complete the Mother Earth is worshipped. The celebration is known by the name of Macandrī-Pūjā. Macandrī is the Mother Earth. In Eastern Punjāb, Mother Earth is called Shaod Mātā whom the farmers invoke to increase their agricultural production. Kharwars of Mirzapur worship the Earth before sowing. To propitiate the Mother Goddess the Khonds offer sacrifices, animal as well as human.[16] In many parts of India when people suffer from drought, rain is invoked by a number of naked women. Two of them are yoked to a plough while the third holds the handle for ploughing. We have many instances of nudity rites in case of the failure of rain.

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[15] Indian Mother Goddess, p. 25.

Matamangarā rite in a marriage ceremony is based on the idea of communicating the fertility of the Earth to the bride.[17] At the time of marriage Lucky Earth is dug from the village tank, and brought to the house for making the marriage altar.[18] In different parts of Maharashtra, the earth is used to make altars for the rite known as Grahśānti. In the Telgu Pradesh, five women are sent to the clay pit to bring the earth for the seats of the bride and bride-groom. When a male child is born among the Nayars, they beat the earth with a coconut leaf. In many places of Northern India, Mother Earth is known as Mahāmāi, whose original shrine is an earthen platform with seven knobs of coloured clay at the head.

Almost at every place in India the Devi is connected with vegetation and fertility. In Rajasthan Gaurī is worshipped as the Earth Goddess. Gauri is one of the names of Pārvati, wife of Mahādeo. The meaning of Gaurī is yellow, emblamatic of the ripened harvest. An image of the Goddess and her husband are placed together. The wowen dance round it, invoking the blessings of the goddess. Men are not allowed to take part. In Madras, seeds of five or nine sorts are mixed and sown in earthen pots. The bride and bridegroom water the seed for four days and on the fifth day the seedlings are thrown into a tank or river. In the Himālayan districts of North Western India the farmers sow barley, Maize, pulse or mustard in a basket of earth and on the twenty-fourth day of the month of Aṣārh and on the last day of the month they place the new sprouts among small clay images of Śiva and Pārvati and worship them. Next day they cut down the green stalks and wear them in their head-dress. At the temple of Padmāvati in Bombay, during the Navarātra, a Garden of Adonis is cultivated in front of the pedestal of the goddess. A Garden of Adonis is the custom of planting pots of corn, herbs and flowers as charms to promote the growth of vegetation. In many parts of Northern India a festival Jayi is celebrated, in which, on the seventh day of the bright half of Śrāvaṇa, grains of barley are sown in a pot of manure and on the first day of the month, the women and the girls take the yellowish-green stalks out and distribute the plants to their male friends who bind them in their turbans. The Bengalee women worship the vegetation goddess Itu on the sunday of the month of Mārgaśīrṣa. The Garo priest at sowing time, invokes Rohini, the goddess of vegetation. In western India various kinds of grain are worshipped in honour of the Mother Goddess. In Uttar Pradesh, on one of the Navarātra days special agricultural rites are performed. In fact the Navarātra ceremony of the Mother Goddess is nothing but a harvest festival. In Karhmir and Punjāb, during the Navarātra, plants of barley and wheat are placed in earthen pot and offered to the Mother Goddess. In the Deccan, the goddess is conceived as residing in seeds and plants. In the whole of South India the vegetation goddess is worshipped as mother.

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[16] Macpherson, Memorials of Service in India, p. 117.
[17] Crooke, Religion and Folklore in Northern India, p. 51.
[18] Thurston, Castes and Tribes of Southern India, p. 355.

In every part of the world Mother Goddess is chiefly connected with vegetation and fertility. In Germany corn is personified under the name of Corn Mother. The Peruvians have a faith that a Divine Mother causes the growth of all useful plants. Rice Mother is popular in Indonesia. In Bengal goddess Lakṣmī is symbolised by a certain quantity of rice kept in a basket. The worship of Navapatrikā, which is an important aspect of Durgā-pujā, shows that the goddess is concerned with vegetation. The Navapatrikā consists of nine leaves or plants. The nine goddesses presiding over the nine plants are collectively called Navadurgā. Durgā-pūjā is the most popular expression of the mother-cult in modern times.

It is evident now that the Earth Mother came into existence when our primitive people began to settle down in agricultural communities. All over the world, the earth spirit is generally regarded as female.

Mother-Goddess as Protectress of Children

There is a strong belief that Mother Goddess causes conception of children in women and protects them from all dangers and evils. The old Cretan Mother Goddess was associated with fertility and child birth. The Greek Artemis was a protectress of children. Roman goddess Diana was also supposed to be a protectress of children. The Teutonic Freyja was associated with fertility and childbirth. In many respects she resembled Indian goddess Ṣaṣṭhi. Sometimes when the rate of infant mortality was high, Mother Goddess were especially worshipped so that they might not cause any harm to the children. The Mahābhārata mentions Rākṣasī Jara who was the protectress of the children. Hāritī the Buddhist goddess is also regarded as the Mother who protects children. All over India there are many goddesses, who have various functions to perform including the protection of children.

The City-Goddess

After the protection of the children, the next issue was the protection of the city or the town. Our ancestors were quite alert and from the cult of Mother Goddess they developed the idea of the City Goddess. Tripurādevi became the guardian deity of Tripurā, the capital of the Kalachri kings ef Chedi. In Bengal the goddess Kāli is generally worshipped as the protectress of a particular locality. Patnadevi protects Patna. Ambā is the guardian deity of Amber. Jālpā Devi protects Jwalāmukhi in Punjāb. Ujjayini Devi is the presiding goddess of Ujjayini. The Kūrmā Purāṇa mentions more than one thousand names of Mother Goddess. It is believed that the goddess is worshipped in 108 holy places under different names. Devi Purāṇa provides a list of the places.

The Goddess of Disease

How can the idea of well-being be materialised unless the man in his youth and old age is protected from various kinds of diseases. The smallpox goddess in Northern India is called Śitalā Devi. She is a much dreaded goddess. The Muslims of Atari tribes of Madhya Pradesh worship her as Mātā. In Tāmil land Mari is the goddess of smallpox. In Mysore Sukhajamma is the goddess of measles and pox. At Gayā the plague Mother is worshipped as Bombāi Māi. In South India she is known as Plague-Amma. Many Chandīs are worshipped in Bengal in connection with diseases. Māri Bhawāni is worshipped as Cholera Mother in Uttar Pradesh and Punjāb. In Central India she is known as Moti-Mātā, before which goats are sacrificed and copper coins and flowers are offered. In the time of cholera, the Bagia priests propitiate the village mother Khermātā. Bhils of Central India, during cholera epidemic also worship the village Mother. In many of the Telgu villages the goddess Pedamma is worshipped in connection with epidemics.

Mistress of Animals

Mother Goddess is the mistress of the wild animals, snakes, birds and fishes. In the Harivaṁśa, it is said that the Mother Goddess living in the Vindhyas has the following of fowls, goats, rams, lions, and tigers. Her vehicle is lion. The people of Berar worship the Village Mother in the form of tiger-goddess (Vaghi Devi). In Mysore villages the goddess Huliamma is worshipped in the form of a tigress. Khands worship Mother Goddess in the form of a elephant. The Rājputs consider the wild pig as representing the goddess Gaurī. Bhainsāsuri, the defied buffalo has become a form of the goddess Kāli in popular belief. The goddess Bhrāmari is the mistress of bees and wasps. In Bundelkhand Bhirani snakes are recognised as a form of the Mother Goddess. In Bengal Manasā is worshipped as the goddess presiding over the snakes. In Madhya Pradesh, the Garia shepherds worship Diśāli Devi as the protectress of sheepen. Tharus worship Barachaṇḍi as the castle protectress. Among the Parayans, Bhagawati is the goddess who preserves the bulls. All over India cow is regarded as a form of Mother Goddess.

Mistress of the Mountain

Mother Goddess is regarded as the mistress of the Mountains also. Aeagean Mother Goddess was worshipped as the lady of the Mountain. Such Mountain-Goddesses are found all over the world. In our country Haimavati, Girjā, Śaila-Sutā, Śailputrī and Vindhya-vāsini etc. are the goddesses whose association with hills is indicated in their names. Umā-Haimavati is one of the most important Mother Goddess of India. This goddess in later works have been identified with Pārvati and Durgā. We find many mountain resorts of the Mother Goddesses in the Purāṇas. Even today we can see numerous temples of the goddesses at the top of the hills.

Slayer of Demons

"In the history of religion it is generally found that there is constant struggle for existence even among the divinities and that the fittest of them can survive only by observing the qualities of others. Every important god or goddess must therefore be a composite character. Many of the Earth and Corn Mothers, under different historical conditions, merged their independent entities into some greater divinities."[19] Thus the Corn Mother Śākambhari is regarded only as a form of Durgā into whom she was absorved. Primarily Durgā was a goddess of Vegetation and fertility, but later on she is equipped with arms and regarded as the destroyer of enemies.

The terrible group of goddesses is represented by Chandikā, Kālī and others. Chandikā is nowhere associated with Śiva. She is Viṣṇumāyā and worshipped as Nārāyaṇi. Chandikā is purely a war-goddess. Her only function is to kill the demons. The Chandikā was further developed in the conception of Kālī. In Devimahātmya she is identified with Chaumuṇḍā, She killed the demons Chaṇḍa and Muṇḍa, In many Purāṇas, the Devi is chiefly regarded as a war-goddess, She confers victory on her Bhaktas. When the demons Śumbha and Niśumbha became very powerful, the Devi destroyed them both. She killed the demon Durgama and became great as Durgā. As Bhīmā Devi she slew the Rākṣasas on the mount of Himavat. As Bhrāmri she killed the demon Arunākṣa. Devi's fight against the Asuras is known to all.

Worship of Linga and Yoni

The worship of male and female organ is closely connected with the mother-cult. It is a development of erotic rites of fertility. The Linga symbolises the act of cultivation and the Yoni, the fruit bearing earth. According to Ellis[20] the worship of the human generative organs was wide spread among the primitive peoples and its relics are still found in the backward countries all over the world. Even in the middle ages phallic worship was practised in France and Belgium. At Roman marriage the bride was required to sit upon the image of the phallic god. Phallic worship have been found in the Aegean, Egypt, and in the land of Semites. Models of Linga and Yoni have been found in the Indus valley culture. Thus the phallic cult was deeply ingrained in the Hindū religion of third millenium B.C. The origin of the Yoni-cult of the later Tantras must be sought in the pre-historic culture of Harappā. In fact the Tāntrik Śri Chakra is nothing but the representation of female generative organ. The word Tantra is derived from the root tan, the meaning of which is to multiply. Originally the male and female organs were worshipped as symbols of procreation and fruitfulness.

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[19] Indian Mother Goddess, p. 62.
[20] Ewe-Speaking Peoples, p. 41 f.

Symbolic meaning of Linga and Yoni finds support in a statement of Manu[21]. In the words of N.N. Bhattacharyya[22], "The woman, being the mother of race, is essentially the life producer, and her male partner the begetter. In the matter of procreation the union of the two is essential philosophically. But the agent about whose maternal functions there is no doubt is the woman." In primitive society there was some uncertainty about paternity but the case of mother was clear. Thus, the woman and "her organs and attributes have been the life-giving symbols par excellence ever since their first appearance in the Middle East and the Europe at the beginning of upper palaeolithic."[23] It appears that our primitive tried to increase the generative power of nature by imitating the art of human procreation.

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[21] IX, 37.

[22] Indian Mother Goddess, p. 34.

[23] E.O. James, Pre-historic Religion, p. 153.

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The Three Main Goddesses

The three main goddesses are Saraswati, Lakṣmi and Durgā. They are symbols of learning, wealth and power. We have already discussed about the Mother-cult which was universally prevalent. "Old traditions testify to the fact that all cultures had to pass through the matriarchal phase in the evolution of their social structure."[1] In the early civilization of the Middle East, calamities were attributed to the male gods, while blessings accrued from the goddesses. In the Egyptian and Greek mythology goddesses were known for their benevolence, but they were capable of destruction also.

Śāktas consider Śakti or the female principle, as the real sorce of energy and activity. They have strong faith that but for the Devi's help, the god himself can achieve very little. The principal shrine of the Śāktas is situated at Kālighāt in Calcutta were Kāli reigns supreme.

When a goddess is seen in association with her consort she has only two hands, one holding a flower in Kataka-pose and the other hanging by her side. She is depicted as a beautiful lady with a smiling face, prominent breasts and decorated with all her usual ornaments. When a Devi is idolised independently, she can be shown in any of the three forms ; mild, benevolent and fierce. Generally she has four or more hands carrying the special emblems and wapons of their consort. In their independent role the Śakti goddesses have magic charms and Yantras. Their association with these mystic symbols makes them more powerful. In the words of Edward Moor[2], "It has been noticed, that the principal attri-

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1. D.P. Thapar, Icons in Bronze, p. 101.
2, The Hindū Pantheon, p. 64,

butes of the Deity Brahmā, Viṣṇu and Śiva, have consorts assigned to them ; which consorts are personifications respectively of the active energies of their lords, and are called Śaktis. Saraswati is the Śakti of Brahmā, Lakṣmi of Viṣṇu, and Pārvati of Śiva : hence those, of whatever sect, who worship exclusively the female power-Pārvati (Devi), however more especially, are called Śāktas."

Saraswati

She is the wife of creator Brahmā. The Vaiṣṇavas of Bengal have a popular legend that formerly she was the wife of Viṣṇu as were Lakṣmi and Gangā. Once the ladies disagreed so Viṣṇu transferred Saraswati to Brahmā and Gangā to Śiva and contended himself with Lakṣmi alone. Saraswati is associated with Brahmā but she is seldom seen with her consort. Probably it symbolises that knowledge and learning are not the monopoly of anybody. Saraswati is the goddess of learning and responsible for all the creative sciences and arts. She is represented as of a white colour, without any superfluity of lims and graceful figure, wearing a slender crescent on her brow and sitting on a lotus. Often she is depicted seated on a rock surrounded by swans and lotus flowers in the water.

Saraswati has always been shown as a benevolent deity with calm and graceful features. Her two back hands carry a rosary and a book or a lotus flower and the two front ones hold a viṇā. In some images she is sitting on her vehicle, the peacock. In other figures she stands on an open lotus without any bends in her body. She has four hands carrying a rosasy, a water vessel, a book and the front right hand is in Abhaya-mudrā. Her body is decorated with the usual ornaments and the sacred thread. Lute in the hands of Saraswati indicates her special contribution in the field of music. She is worshipped as the patroness of the fine arts, especially of music. Her attributes correspond with those of Minerva Musica, in Greece or Italy, who invented the flute, and presided over literature.

Saraswati in the Ṛigveda

The word Saraswati mean flowing ; applicable both to the river, and the goddess of eloquence. She is also called Vāṇi, Brāhmi, and by several other names. Saraswati is invoked in three entire hymns of the Ṛigveda. She is regarded as the most worshipful of all the rivers. "She is depicted in grandiloquent terms as a rushing, powerful flood, that surpasses all other waters in greatness, with her mighty waves tearing away the heights of the mountains as she moves roaring along."[3] The basin of the Saraswati was the last halting place of the Vedic Indians before they left the land of the seven rivers and entered Jumnā-Gangā area. "The Saraswati, as the region where the five tribes tarried longest, was doubtless the centre of gravity of the Ṛigvedic world. Its banks would be hallowed by the composition of hymns and the performances of sacrificial rites. In fact, the river Saraswati and its area were in sacredness the Vedic analoque of the later Gangā and Madhyadeśa. The religious significance of that sacred stream is indicated by the fact that on its banks two special goddesses apparently had their origin, Saraswati 'she of the Saraswati river' and Bhārtī, the personified offering of Bharatas."[4] Since the area of Saraswati river was so important in connection with the composition of hymns, that the goddess Saraswati came to be regarded as the inspirer of fair hymns and the stimulator of good thoughts. The transition to the post-vedic meaning of Saraswati as goddess of eloquence and wisdom presents no difficulty. "Vedic wisdom flourished with in the river system of Punjāb, just as Egyptian wisdom was nourished by the Nile and Babylonian wisdom by the Euphrates and Tigris."

Saraswati, while an earthly stream, has a heavenly origin. She is called Pāvīravī, probably daughter of lightning, and is besought to descend to the sacrifice from the great mountain of the sky. Saraswati grants progeny and assists in procreation.

Worship of the Goddess

On the fifth day of the month Māgh, Saraswati the goddess of knowledge and learning is worshipped with offerings of perfumes, flowers and dressed rice. The implements of writing and books are treated with respect and are not used on this day. The following meditation on this goddess is worth mentioning :

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3. Griswold, The Religion of the Ṛigveda, pp. 301-302.
4. Ibid., pp. 302-303.

"May the goddess of speech enable us to attain all possible felicity ; she who wears on her locks a young moon ; who shines with exquisite lustre; whose body bends with the weight of her full breasts ; who sits reclined on a white lotus ; and from the crimson lotus of her hands pour radiance on the implements of writing, and on the books produced by her favour."[5]

Saraswati is especially propitiated in the marriage ceremonies of the Brāhmaṇas. The following hymn is chanted :

"Charming Saraswati, swift as a mare, whom I celebrate in the face of this universe, protect this solemn rite. O thou ! in whom the elements were produced, in whom this universe was framed, I will now sing that hymn, which constitutes the highest glory of women."[6]

Since Saraswati is the active energy of Brahmā, she is therefore endowed with his attribute of creation. In the tenth Maṇḍala of the Ṛigveda she identifies herself with the supreme universal soul. The hymn says, "......my origin is in the midst of the occan; and therefore do I pervade all beings, and touch this heaven with my form. Originating all beings, I pass like the breeze ; I am above this heaven, beyond this earth ; and what is the great one, that am I."

When a Hindū tells a lie, or gives false evidence, the sin can be expiated by an easy oblation to the goddess of speech. Manu writes that false witnesses must offer, as oblation to Saraswati, cakes of rice and milk addressed to the goddess of speech ; and this will they fully expiate the venial sin of benevolent falsehood.[7]

Saraswati, although of ancient origin is not worshipped to any large extent in the modern times. She is a goddess mainly of scholars, artists and musicians. Images of Saraswati are seldom seen. Her images are usually in bas-reliefs and in stone sculpture in the temples. The distinguishing features as stated earlier are the rosary, the book, the lute and the presence of the peacock.

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5. Asiatic Researches, Vol. III, p. 273.
6. Asiatic Researches, Vol. VII, p. 303
7. Manu-Smriti, Chapter VIII, verse, 105

The vehicle of Kārtikeya, son of Pārvati is also a peacock. It seems to connect Saraswati with the Śakti of the destroying power.

Brahmā is generally associated with only one consort, Saraswati, but sometimes another goddess Gāyatri is also mentioned. There is a strong view that Gāyatri is another name of Saraswati. According to a legend Saraswati became incorporated in her. She is the goddess of literature. A special verse known as the Gāyatrimantra is considered to be the most auspicious incantation in Hindū scripture. It is recited daily in every prayer by the devotee. But Goddess Gāyatri is seldom seen in an image either alone or with her consort.

Lakṣmi

Lakṣmi in Hindū mythology is the name of the consort of Viṣṇu. According to the mystical doctrine of the Vaiṣṇavas, Viṣṇu produced three goddesses, Brāhmi, Lakṣmi and Chandikā. The first represents his creative, the second preserving and the third destroying energy. This view reveals the superiority of Viṣṇu over the other gods of the Hindū triad. Viṣṇu is supposed to have two consorts, Lakṣmi (Śrīdevi) and Bhumidevi. In some compositions he has a third consort, Nīladevi, sitting on the serpent bed. She is not worshipped independently and there are no individual images of her. The other consort Bhumidevi is the goddess of Earth. She is seldom idolised as an independent deity. Her images are similar to those of Lakṣmi except that she is without the breast band.

Lakṣmi is the goddess of fortune and beauty and arose from the ocean of milk when it was churned by the gods to procure the beverage of immortality, viz. Amrita. It was after this wonderful occurrence that she became the wife of Viṣṇu. According to one text of Rāmāyaṇa "She was reposing on a lotus flower, endowed with transcedent beauty, in the first floor of youth, her body covered with all kinds of ornaments, and marked with every auspicious sign.........Thus originated, and adored by the world, the goddess who is called Padma and Śri, betook herself to the bosom of Hari i.e. Viṣṇu." Lakṣmi has sprung as one of the fourteen gems from the ocean.

Worship of the Goddess

She is considered as the goddess of riches and would be invoked for increase of wealth. The followers of Viṣṇu regard Lakṣmi as the mother of the world and then call her Ādi-Māyā. As the goddess of fortune, the epithet fickle is sometimes applied to Lakṣmi, in contradiction to Pārvati or Sati, who is called faithful. If it symbolises that wealth is most instable, there is nothing wrong in it. But as a goddess of fortune she is always seen with her Lord. In Viṣṇu's Avatāra of Rāma, she became the most faithful spouse of her heroic Lord. In the Avatāra of Kriṣṇa, she was Rukmiṇi, the most beloved of the god. In all the other Avatāras of Viṣṇu, if he had a wife, Lakṣmi is with him.

An interesting festival is celebrated in honour of this goddess on the fifth lunar day of the light half of the month of Māgh, when she is identified with Saraswati. A mention of this festival has already been made earlier. In his treatise on festivals, a great modern authority, Raghunandana mentions that Lakṣmi is to be worshipped in the forenoon of that day with flowers, perfumes, rice and water. Due honour is to be paid to inkstand and writing-reed and no writing should be done. Wilson, in his essay on the 'Religious Festivals of Hindūs' observes, "The whole of the pens and inkstands, and the books, if not too numerous and bulky, are collected, the pens or reeds cleaned, the inkstands scoured, and the books wrapped up in new cloth, are arranged upon a platform, or a sheet, and strewn over with flowers and blades of young barley, and that no flowers except white are to be offered. After performing the necessary rites.........all members of the family assemble and make their prostrations ; the books, the pens, and ink having an entire holiday ; and should any emergency require a written communication on the day dedicated to the divinity of scholarship, it is done with chalk or charcoal upon a block or white board. "According to T. Goldstucker[8], the festival in the month of Māgh seems originally to have been a vernal function, marking the commencement of the spring season.

Lakṣmi being an important goddess is worshipped in several forms. A very popular figure is that of Gaja-Lakṣmi where she is seated in sukhāsana with four hands. The lower two hands carry a conch shell and a bowl of ambrosia while the upper two hands are holding lotus flowers. In this composition two elephants with their trunk raised high and sprinkling water over the Devi are seen on either side of her. This pose is associated with the goddess from the most ancient days, dating back almost to the pre-Christian era. There are several other compositions of Lakṣmi as Vijaya-Lakṣmi signifying power, Dhana-Lakṣmi indicating wealth and Rājya-Lakṣmi denoting splendour.

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[8] Sanskrit and Culture, pp. 57-58.

Lakṣmi is the goddess who presides over marriage, and as the deity of prosperity is invoked also for increase of children, and especially male children. The Viṣṇu Purāṇa contains a hymn addressed to her by Indra, and it is directed that all who desire her aid should use it in their devotions :

> "From thy propitious gaze, oh mighty goddess, men obtain wives, children, dwellings, friends, harvests, wealth. Health, strength, power, victory, happiness are easy of attainment to those upon whom thou smilest. Thou art the mother of all beings, as the god of gods, Hari is their father ; and this world, whether animate or inanimate is pervaded by thee and Viṣṇu. Oh thou who purifiest all things, for sake not our treasures, our granaries, our dwellings, our dependents, our persons, our wives : abandon not our children, our friends, our lineage, our jewels, oh thou who abidest on the bosom of the god of gods. They whom thou desertest are forsaken by truth, by purity and goodness, by every amiable and excellent quality ; whilst the base and worthless upon whom thou lookest favorably become immediately endowed with all excellent qualifications, with families and with power. Be propitious to me, oh goddess, lotus-eyed, and never forsake me more."[9]

In the month of Aświn on the last day of the darknight, ceremonies of a two-fold nature are performed in honour of both Lakṣmi and Bhavāni. A great festival at night with illuminations on trees and houses is celebrated in honour of Lakṣmi. Invocations are made at the same time to Kubera. Prosperity is the object of invocation. Flowers are also offered on this day to Bhavàni, who appears in the Kaliyuga as a damsel of twelve years. Torches and flaming brands are kindled and consecrated to burn the bodies of Kinsmen, who may be dead in a battle or in a foreign country, and to light them through the shades of death to the mansion of Yama.

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[9] Quoted from Wilson's Viṣṇu Purāṇa.

According to a tradition Lakṣmi the goddess of abundance is regarded as the daughter of Bhrigu who promulgated the first code of sacred ordinances. She is named Padma and Kamala, from the sacred lotus. But her most remarkable name is Śri which has a resemblance to the Greek goddess Ceres and means prosperity. The epithet of Śri is applied to several other gods and goddesses. Śri Gaṇeśa is frequently heard. Śri Devi is applied to Pārvati also. In honour of deceased ancestors, Lakṣmi is, among most other deities, earnestly invoked. A donation of milch cow is attended by many appropriate ceremonies, finishing with the following prayers:

"May the goddess, who is Lakṣmi of all beings, and resides among the gods, assume the shape of a milch cow, and procure me comfort.

"May the goddess, who is Rudrāṇi, in a corporal form, and who is the beloved of Śiva, assume the shape of a milch cow and procure me comfort.

"May she, who is Lakṣmi reposing on the bosom of Viṣṇu; she who is the Lakṣmi of the regent of riches; she, who is the Lakṣmi of kings, be a boon-granting cow to me.

"May she, who is Lakṣmi of Brahamā; she who is Swāhā, the wife of fire; she who is the exerted power of the sun, moon, and stars, assume the shape of a milch cow for my prosperity.

"Since thou art Swadha the food of them who are the chief among the manes of ancestors, and Swaha, the consuming power of them who eat solemn sacrifices, therefore being the cow that expeates every sin, procure me comfort.

"I invoke the goddess, who is endowed with attributes of all the gods, who confers all happiness, who bestows abodes in all the worlds, for the sake of all people.

"I pray to that auspicious goddess for immortality and happiness."[10]

The boon granting cow so honoured in the preceding extract, is called Surabhi and her descendants are much revered by all classes of Hindūs. Adoration of cow is most common in India. Images of her and her calf are worshipped, cow-dung is also supposed to be a very cleanly article. Often it is plastered over the cooking-place. The ashes of cow-dung are also of purifying nature. There is an interesting story in the Agni Purāṇa, which relates that a most wicked person, named Chāṇakya, had exceeded every known possibility of salvation. At the court of Indra, in answer to a pointed question, Indra replied that nothing could expiate such persons except the use of sacred ashes. It happened that a crow which was present there conveyed this news to the sinner, who immediatly performed the ceremony and went to heaven. Until revealed by the crow, this potent expiation was unknown. The friendly crow was punished and was forbidden with all her tribe to ascend to heaven, and was doomed on earth to live on carrion.[11]

Lakṣmi along with Gaṇeśa is especially worshipped on the last day of the dark night in the month of Kārtika. In the words of V.S. Agrawala[12]. "Śri Lakṣmi is the consort of Viṣṇu, the cosmic deity, a popular symbol of beauty and prosperity. From the time of the Puruṣa-Sūkta upto now her position as the symbol of a happy home has held the field. She is the daughter of ocean, Lady of the Lake, depicted in art as a beautiful women standing in a lotus pond and bathed with heavenly waters by two or four elephants holding inverted jars in their trunks. The elephants are the quarters of Space and the jar is the recepticle of the Waters of Immortality. The waters of the pond symbolise the Infinite Ocean i.e. the source or the first cause of the universe and the growing lotuses typify the sprouts of life manifesting in visible form."

The most popular image of this deity is in the form of Gaja-Lakṣmi. It is known in the art of Bharhut, Sānchi, Bodhgayā and Udaigiri. In the Kuṣāṇa art of Mathurā this ancient typical figure of Lakṣmi continued to be depicted as a female figure standing on a lotus holding two lotuses in two hands and with a pair of elephants sprinkling water on the head of the goddess with two inverted jars held in the two trunks. In several Kuṣāṇa statues Lakṣmi and Hāriti are depicted side by side as the twin consorts of Kubera. She was also later on shown as the wife of Gaṇeśa. The iconographic conception of Lakṣmi became quite clear by the Gupta period when she is depicted frequently as the consort of Viṣṇu and is seen as shampooing his feet in the Śeṣaśāyi form. Śri-Lakṣmi has been depicted on the reverse of the gold coins of the Guptas and Gāṅgeyadeva. She became the goddess par excellence.

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[10] Colebroke, Asiatic Researches, Vol. VII, p. 276.
[11] Wilford, Asiatic Researches, Vol. IX, p. 93.
[12] Indian-Art, p. 47.

Durgā

According to the epic and Puranic mythology Umā is the principal consort of Lord Śiva. She is also known by her other names; Durgā, Devi, Kāli, Pārvati, Bhawāni, Haimavati, Kātyayāni, and Ambikā. In the Devimahātmya, the sage Mārkaṇḍeya, in reply to a question of king Suratha says, "By Devi, this whole universe, with what is movable and immovable, has been created, and when propitious, she who bestows blessings leads men to their eternal bliss; for she, the eternal goddess, is the highest wisdom, the cause of eternal bliss, and also the cause of for this world; she, who lords over the Lord of the universe."[13] In another passage of the same work she is invoked thus, "O Devi, thou art ths seed of universe, the highest Māyā; all this is bewildered, but, decending on earth, thou art the cause of its final liberation; all the sciences are different modes of thyself." In the Mahābhārata Arjuna says to her, "Of sciences thou art the Brahma-Science." In the Harivaṁśa, Viṣṇu addresses her as Saraswati. The Devimahātmya is a celebrated portion of Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa which is considered to be of special holiness by the worshippers of this goddess. The connection between the legendary history of Umā and Viṣṇu is briefly narrated in the Devimahātmya but this work is chiefly connected with the material feats of the goddess. Umā or Pārvati in her destructive role is worshipped as Durgā or Kāli.

Durgā has a mixed origin. She is a manifestation of the Devi of the Śāktas and of Pārvati. She is also supposed to be a sister of

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[13] Quoted from Goldstucker's Sanskrit and Culture, p. 54.

Viṣṇu. It is due to this reason that she carries the discus and the conch-shell of Viṣṇu in addition to her Śaivite emblems. Her images show her with three eyes and a handsome but stern face. She has four or more hands. She ties a snake round her breasts. She is either standing on a lotus or on the head of a dead buffalo. Often she is shown as seated on the back of a lion or tiger.

Durgā as Mahiṣāsura Mardini

Mahiṣāsura was a demon who had faught with Indra and his celestial bands for a hundred years, defeated him and usurped his throne. The gods decided to lay their grievances before Viṣṇu and Śiva. Conducted by Brahmā, they repaired into the presence of those deities. They were so enraged that a kind of flame issued from their mouths, and from the mouths of the rest of the principal gods: of which was formed a goddess of inexpressible beauty, with ten arms, and each hand holding a different weapon. She is generally called Durgā. She is sent against the demon. She mounts her lion and attacks the monster. But the demon changes his form repeatedly; till at length the goddess plants her foot upon his head and cuts it off with a single stroke of her sword. Immediately the upper part of a human body issues through the neck of the headless buffalo, and aims a stroke which being warded off by the lion with his right paw. Durgā puts an end to the combat by piercing him through the heart with a spear. There are many versions of this story which differ from each other in minor details. But the conclusion of the conflict in all version is the end of the cruel demon. In fact Mahiṣāsura represents the evil which is of different types. This evil is ruthlessly crushed by the goddess. In this noble work different gods also give their help. "The attributes of Durgā, or difficult of access, are conspicuous in the festival called by her name Durgotsava; and in this character she resembles Minerva—not the peaceful inventress of the fine and useful arts, but Pallas, armed with a helmet and spear: both represent heroic virtue, or valour united with wisdom. Both slew demons and giants with their own hands; and both protected the wise and the virtuous, who paid them due adoration."[14]

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[14] Asiatic Researches, Vol.I,p. 251.

In commemoration of her victory over Mahiṣāsura, the Durgā-pujā is annually calebrated throughout Northern India. It is a most important occasion in Bengal. "The goddess is there represented with ten arms, trampling upon the demon, who is also attacked by her lion and wounded in the chest by her spear. She has also laid hold of him by the hair, and is about to chop off his head."

The bright half of the month of Aświna is specially devoted to Durgā. The first nine nights are called Navarātri. A grand image of the goddess is prepared during these days. The fifth day is allotted for the preparation of her dress. In the sixth day she is awakened. The seventh, eighth and ninth are the great days. In the last of which the victims immolated to her honour must be slain. As directed in the Kalika Purāṇa, "The sacrificed beasts must be killed by one blow, with a broad sword or sharp axe." The next day the image of the goddess is reverently cast into the river which finishes the festival. On the fifteenth day, that of the full moon the devotees of the goddess pass the whole night in a merriment. It is unlucky to sleep because on this night Nisumbha led his army against Durgā, and Lakṣmi descended, promising wealth to those who were awake. On this night Kubera and Indra are also worshipped.

Other material feats of the Devi include the destruction of two demons, Madhu and Kaitabha; who had endangered the existence of Brahmā; She defeated the army of Chaṇḍa and Muṇḍa two demon servants of Sambha and Nisumbha. She also killed the demon Raktavīja whose each drop of blood, when shed, produced hundred of demons like himself. Ultimately she destroyed the two most powerful demons Sumbha and Nisumbha themselves.

"The idea of the possible connection of Durgāpujā with the equinox, is suggested by the fact, that there is a corresponding festival about the time of the vernal equinox too, in which, though it is not so popular as the autumnal pūjā, the same groups of figures are constructed, and the image of the goddess is in the same attitude, with the same attendance, and the same enemy." Three weeks after Durgāpujā, another festival in the honour of this goddess takes place, to commemorate her victory over Chaṇḍa and Muṇḍa. This is called Kālipūjā. The goddess is shown as holding the severed head of Chaṇḍa in her hand, with the heads of his soldiers formed into a garland and their hands wreathed into a covering round her lions.

Kāli is another manifestation of the great goddess. She is worshipped as Mahākāli or Bhadrakāli. They have a fearful appearance with small tusks protruding from the mouth. Their hair is shown in shape of flames. Often the head is encircled with a row of skulls. They carry weapons of destruction. Mahākāli has four hands whereas Bhadrakāli has twelve or more. There are several shrines dedicated to these deities in the eastern part of India. The most famous is the Kāli temple at Calcutta. In fact Durgā is worshipped in many forms. Kāli represents the principle of darkness. She is shown as delighting in the slaughter of her foes. She is fond of bloody sacrifices. Hundreds of animals are sacrificed to quench the blood-thirst of the deity. She is worshipped in the darkest night of the month. Either she resides with Śiva on the mount of Kailāśa, or in her own place in the Vindhya mountain, where she amuses herself with hunting. Her representations are numerous. Sometimes she rides a bull, with a trident in her hand, a serpent as bracelet, and a half-moon on her forehead. Sometimes she rides on her lion. Her person is richly dressed and ornamented between her full breasts, a five-headed serpent uprears itself. She has a necklace of human heads. Her eardrops are elephants and a row of snake heads peeps over her coronet. Her forehead is marked with Śiva's third eye. Over all she has a very fierce and threatening look.

According to Kalika Purāṇa the flesh of the antelope and the rhinoceros given to Kāli delight for five hundred years. By a human sacrifice the goddess is pleased for one thousand years and by a sacrifice of three men, one hundred thousand years. Blood drawn from the offerer's own body is looked upon as a proper oblation to the goddess Chanḍikā. An enemy may be immolated by proxy, substituting a buffalo or a goat and calling the victim by the name of the enemy through the whole ceremony, thereby intusing, by holy texts, the soul of the enemy into the body of the victim. Which will, when immolated, deprive the foe of life also. On this occasion the sacrificer says:

"O goddess, of horrified form ! O Chanḍikā ! eat, devour, such a one my enemy. O consort of Fire ! salutation to fire. This is the enemy who has done me mischief, now personated by an animal—destroy him, O Mahāmāri ! spheng, spheng ! eat, devour."

In Wilson's translation of the drama Mālati and Madhava, there is an invocation addressed to Kāli, which serves to illustrate the worship of the figure described in the text. The scene is laid in a temple of Kāli situated in a burning ground. The priest and priestess prepare a living victim, the beautiful Mālati. Bound and garlanded she awaits the stroke of the sacrificial axe. The priest rises up for the final invocation and dances round the deity—

Hail ! hail ! Chaumuṇḍā, Mighty goddess hail !
I glorify thy sport, when in the dance,
That fills the court of Śiva with delight
Thy foot descending, spurns the earthly globe.
Beneath the weight, the broad backed tortoise reels,
The egg of Brahmā trembles at the shock;
And in a yawning chasm that gapes like hell
The sevenfold main tumultuously rushes.
The elephant hide that robes thee, to thy steps
Swings to and fro ; —the whirling talon rend
The crescent on thy brow ; —from the torn orb
The trickling nectar falls, and every skull
That gems thy necklace laughs with horrid life
Attendant spirits tremble and applaud;
The mountains fall before thy powerful arms,
Around whose length the sable serpents twine
Their swelling forms, and knit terrific bands
Whilst from the hood expanded, frequent flash
Envenomed flames.

As rolls thy aweful head,
The lowering eye that glows amidst thy brow
A fiery circle designates, that wraps
The sphere within its terrible circumference:
Whilst by the banner on the dreadful staff,
High waved, the stars are scattered from their orbits.

The three eyed god exults in the embrace
Of his fair spouse, as Gauri sinks appalled
By the distracting cries of countless fiends,
Who shout thy praise. Oh may such dance afford,
Whatever we need,—whatever may yield us happiness."

The images of Durgā with two, four and six hands are found in considerable number in Kuṣāṇa and Gupta art. But the most popular figure is that of Mahiṣāsuramardini. In the words of V.S. Agrawala,[15] "The worship of Mahiṣāsuramardini became popular throughout the country and we find a magnificent representation of the conflict of the goddess riding on a lion with the demon Mahiṣāsura in the early Pallava art."

The peculiar tendencies of Pallava art are continued in the classical Hindū art of Java. "Elements of violence and cruelty are avoided, mitigated, keyed down; the dramatic, climatic element is sublimated into a serene grandeur; sensuality is subtilized into a spiritual charm and gracefulness. The bulky body of such a demon as the fierce buffalo—adversary here shows nothing of a threatening fierceness; it is subdued to an almost friendly appearance......... He is wholly resigned to his doom at the hands of the Goddess."[16]

In the Devimahātmya the goddess is described as an unconquerable, sublime warrior-maid, who came into being out of the combined wraths of all gods gathered in council. She was provided with eighteen arms. Is it not symbolising the effort of all the good people to eradicate a great evil ? This effort is still continuing. In the words of H. Zimmer,[17] "The brilliant amazon, provided with the weapons of all the gods and stimulated by their hymns to praise, is the representative of all the affirmative forces of the universe. The demon is already hopeless; his massive head and club, suggesting darkness, violence and resentment, are about to fall."

The lively series of transformation by the great demon is an excellent example of the mythological trait of externalization. The buffalo-demon employs his Māyā-power and projects his vital energy into new forms. The universe itself is a transformation of the Absolute. In fact Indian though aims to release men from the projections of their own Māyā. It seeks to change the slave of Māyā into a Lord of Māyā. H. Zimmer further observes:

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[15] Indian Art, p. 260.
[16] H. Zimmer, Myths and Symbols in Indian Art and Civilization, p. 196.
[17] Ibid., p. 192.

> "Indian symbols of art voice the same truth as Indian philosophy and myth. They are signals along the way of the same pilgrim's progress, directing human energies to the same goal of transmutation. Our task, therefore, as student of Indian myth and symbols, is to understand the abstract conceptions of India's philosophical doctrine as a kind of intellectual commentary on what stands crystallized and unfolded in the figures and patterns of symbolism and art, and conversely, to read the symbols as the pictorial script of India's ultimately changeless wisdom."

11

Ganesa the Symbol of Wisdom

Introduction

Gaṇeśa is one of the most popular and widely worshipped deities. He is the remover of obstacles and his grace is the prerequisite for success in all undertakings. His cult spread to several countries of East Asia. In Western India, every year in the month of September a great festival is held in his honour and the whole week is allotted to his worship. Almost every Hindū family buys a Gaṇapati-murti, prays to it during that period and as a final ritual takes it out in a procession for immersion in the sea. Among the business community Gaṇeśa is considered most auspicious and is invoked before all religious ceremonies or the starting of new undertakings. In Hindū marriages Gaṇeśapujā forms a very important part of the ritual.

In South India there are many temples dedicated to this deity. Almost every village has an image of Gaṇeśa under the name of Vighneśvara. His images are seen in the temples dedicated to Śiva or Viṣṇu. He is known by many names and some of them express his chief attributes. As Vighneśvara he is the lord of obstacles and as Gaṇapati symbolises wisdom. He is also called lord of Buddhi and Siddhi and is supposed to be a great boon-giver.

Gaṇeśa is regarded as the eldest son of Śiva and Pārvati. Many legends are connected with his origin. According to a popular belief, he was created by Pārvati from a portion of her own body to act as her personal body-guard. Once Śiva lost his temper and cut off Gaṇeśa's head. When Pārvati remonstrated, Śiva ordained that he be brought back to life by attaching to his body the head of the first living being seen. This happened to be an elephant. Another legened relates that Śiva and Pārvati were sporting on a full moon night in the forest. They saw a male and female elephant doing the same. They changed themselves into elephants. So their son was born in this form. According to the third legend once the demons became very powerful through their austerities and sacrifices. They started harassing the gods. The gods appealed to create a Lord of obstacles who would put hindrances in the way of demons. Another myth accuses Pārvati of becoming so jealous of handsome Gaṇeśa that she condemned him to look like an elephant.

In fact Gaṇeśa is the Hindū god of purdence and is represented with an elephant's head. Elephant is a symbol of sagacity. The vehicle of Gaṇeśa is a rat which is peculiarly marked by its wisdom and foresight. He has generally four hands but sometimes six, or eight, or only two. In the words of E. Moor[1], "It is common to see a figure of the god of prudence in or over bankers and other shops; and upon the whole, there is perhaps no deity in the Hindū Pantheon so often seen and addressed. In the voyage to India, by Paolino de San Bantolomeo, the author says, "Statues which supply the place of mile-stones, and serve to guide strangers, are found everywhere erected along the high roads. As the Greeks and Romans employed for their purpose the god Terminus, the Hindūs use their deity Gaṇeśa, who by the common people, not well acquainted with Samscred language, is called Poleyar." According to E. Moor the author's above narrative is confined to the southern parts of the peninsula, and chiefly to the province of Malabar and Canara. Statues placed as direction-posts are not found everywhere. What Paolino calls a key, in the form of a hook is in fact the instrument with which elephants are guided, called Aṅkuśa. Gaṇeśa has not always a mouse under him, as the learned carmalite states. He is often seen without it. He has been compared with the Roman deity Janus.

In the South India there is an annual feast in honour of Gaṇeśa called Pilleyar Chaturthi. It falls in the beginning of September and is observed as a general holiday. Temporary images of the deity are made and worshipped by a large supply of incense and cakes. The image is carried along the public streets and around

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1. **Hindū Pantheon, p. 95.**

the boundaries of village in gay procession. In Northern India Saṅkaṭa-Chaturthi is celebrated in the month of Māgh on the fourth day of the dark night. Women worship the deity for off-spring and prosperity. On the Dipāwali day Gaṇeśa is worshipped along with goddess Lakṣmi.

In the words of V.S. Agrawala,[2] "Gaṇapati, mentioned in the Ṛigveda, was the symbol of Brāhmaṇas-pati Soma, the universal infinite ocean deemed as the primeval cause of creation. Its elephant head being biggest typifies the same, i.e. Mahat. Soma was also called honey. Its symbol was the sweet cake which in iconography becomes the sweet ball of Gaṇeśa. The micky mouse shows the mind borrowing in earth or matter."

Icons of Gaṇeśa

Images of Gaṇeśa are many and varied in sculpture. They may be in sitting or standing poses and the plinth may be a louts flower or the deity may be riding his vehicle, a mouse. Sometimes he is seen on a lion. In the sitting postures his leg is generally folded and rests on the seat with his right leg in different positions. The trunk of the deity is generally turned towards the left. He has two eyes and four hands. In some compositions he is seen with three eyes and six, eight or even sixteen hands. The deity has a protruding belly with a serpent tied round it. An interesting legend is connected with this last feature. Once Gaṇeśa having consumed an enormous amount of sweet cakes was going home on his vehicle. In the way a serpent frightened the mouse and the god was thrown off causing his overloaded belly to burst. He immediately got hold of the serpent and tied it round his belly. Besides it he also bears a serpent across his chest in place of a sacred thread. He lost one of his tusks in a fight and is therefore with only one tusk.

Among the standing images there are only two varieties. The first is Nrittya-Gaṇapati and the other is Prasanna-Gaṇapati. In the first form the deity is dancing on a lotus plinth and the right leg is raised in the air. His hands are carrying a battle axe, a noose, a sweet cake, a tusk, a serpent, and a lotus flower. The lower right hand is in Gaja-hasta mudrā. The trunk also carries a flower. In the second form the deity stands with three bends in his body. He has four hands. The upper two hold a noose of rope and a goad, the lower two are in Abhaya and Varada mudrā. In some compositions the hands carry different things. The head-gear of these images is the conical Kranḍa-mukuṭa.

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[2] **Indian Art, p. 49.**

In sitting images several varieties can be seen. In Bāla Gaṇapati the deity is shown as a child with the head of an elephant. His four hands are carrying a mango, a banana, a wood apple and a piece of suggar-cane. In Taruṇa-Gaṇapati he is represented as an youth. He has four hands carrying a noose of rope, a goad, a fruit and a bamboo-stick. As a full grown deity Gaṇeśa is known as Vīr-Vighneśa. He has sixteen hands carrying various emblems. One special composition is known as Heramba-Gaṇapati. In this form the deity is sitting on a lion with his five heads. His eight hands are carrying various emblems, the lower two being in Abhaya and Varada mudrā.

The most popular presentation of Gaṇeśa is that where he is seated in Sokhāsana with his left leg folded and resting on a lotus plinth and supporting his Devi, Lakṣmi, in his lap. There are several variety of this posture. The main difference is only in the number of hands. These figures are known as Śakti-Gaṇapati. The deity has three eyes and four hands. The Devi holds a louts flower in her left and embraces Gaṇeśa with her right hand. The images in which Lakṣmi is in his lap is known as Lakṣmi-Gaṇapati. In Uchchhishta-Gaṇapati, the Devi sitting in his lap is without any garment. This deity is supposed to be a great boon-giver. Mahā-Gaṇapati has ten hands and Urdhva-Gaṇapati and Pingala-Gaṇapati have been shown with six hands.

No image of Gaṇeśa of the Kuṣāṇa period has yet been found. In the earliest stage Gaṇeśa was only a Yakṣa. In the early art of Amarāvati and Mathurā he has been depicted in this form. In course of time the elephant-headed Yakṣa developed in the form of Gaṇapati. In the Gupta period he was represented both as a human figure with elephant's head and also in a dancing pose.

The Gaṇapatyas

In the Mahābhārata Ganeśvaras and Vināyakas are mentioned amongst the gods who observe the action of men and are present everywhere. They are said to remove all evil from men when praised. In Mānavagrihya sūtra, an account of four Vināyakas is given. Their names are :

1. Sālakaṭaṅkaṭa,
2. Kūsumāndarājaputra,
3. Usmita, and
4. Devayajana.

A proper ceremony frees the persons haunted by the Vināyakas. During the period that had elapsed between the composition of the Sūtra and that of Smriti, the four Vināyakas had become one Goṇapati-Vināyaka, having Ambikā for his mother. According to R.G. Bhandarkar Gaṇapati-Vināyaka the son of Ambikā, was introduced into the Hindū pantheon much later. None of the Gupta inscriptions contains any mention of his name or announces any gift in his honour. Between the end of the fifth and the end of eighth century the Gaṇapati cult must have come into practice.[3]

An inscription indicating the prevalence of the worship of Gaṇapati is found at a place called Ghaṭiyālā twenty-two miles North-West of Jodhpur. There is a column, on the top of which there are four images of Gaṇapati facing the four quarters. In the opening sentence of the inscription an obeisance is made to Vināyaka. In the words of R.G. Bhandarkar, "Gaṇapati's reputation for wisdom is, I believe to be attributed to the confusion between him and Brihaspati, who in RV.II,23,1, is called Gaṇapati. Brihaspati of course, is the Vedic god of wisdom, and is called the sage of sages."

Six classes of Gaṇpatya sect are mentioned by Ānandagiri. The first consists of those who worship Mahā-Gaṇapati, who is the creator and alone remains when Brahmā and others have been destroyed at the time of dissolution. By his own wonderful powers he creates Brahmā and others. One who meditates on this Gaṇapati, attains supreme bliss. The second variety is Haridrāgaṇapati. He is regarded as the greatest lord of the Brāhmaṇas engaged in the creation of the world. He should be worshipped as being dressed in a yellow garment, bearing a yellow sacred thread, having four arms and three eyes. He holds a noose, an elephant-goad and a staff in his hand. He who worships the deity in this form, obtains emancipation. The worshipper of this Gaṇapati should bear on his arms, the marks of Gaṇapati's face and one tooth impressed upon them by a heated iron stamp. The third variety is Uchchhisṭa-gaṇapati. The followers of this sect resort to the path of Vāmamārga. The form of meditation in this sect is very obscene. There is no distinction of caste among the followers of this sect. The followers should have a red mark on their fore-head. The remaining three varieties are, Navanīta, Svarṇa and Samtāna. The followers of these three Gaṇapatis worship their god according to the Śruti. They regard the whole world as Gaṇapati and adore him as such.

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[3] Vaiṣṇavism, Śavism and Minor Religious Systems, p. 148.

In fact the worship of Gaṇapati without reference to any particular sect is parctised by nearly all Hindūs at the beginning of any religious ceremony. His image made of clay is worshipped with great pomp in the Marāṭha country. At Poona there is a special establishment for the exclusive worship of this deity.

12

A Few more Symbols

Lotus

It is one of the highest symbols in Indian art and religion. It symbolises the life floating on the surface of creative waters. It is the flower which opens its petals to the rising sun. It is a flower of life blossoming on earth ; it is the visible sign of conciousness in matter. In the words of V.S. Agrawala[1]," A gamut of meaning is associated with the lotus. It symbolises the principle of growth, rising from the immortal Navel of Viṣṇu, or the cosmic deity whose awakening throws up the lotus as the seat of Brahmā, the genius of emanation. The lotus-leaf typifies the womb of creation. Lotus is also the cosmic mind and of the centre of energy in the individual."

According to Bhāgavatas the birth of cosmos form a lotus in distinction to the other belief of the world from the golden egg. The womb of the individual and the universal mother giving birth to the child is symbolised as the lotus growing in water. According to Hindū mind, the waters are female, and the cosmic lotus is their generative organ. The cosmic lotus is called the highest form of earth. Śri Lakṣmi is associated in every possible way with the symbol of lotus. She is praised as "lotus born", "standing on a lotus", "lotus coloured", "lotus thighed", "lotus eyed", "abounding in lotuses", "decked with lotus garlands". Lotus Goddess is honey-like, and is said to grant gold, cows, horses and slaves. She wears a garland of silver and gold. She bestows health, long life, prosperity, offspring and fame. The goddess Padma or Lotus stands above or is seated upon a lotus. Padmapriyā is among the principal figures sculptured on the richly decorated gates and railings of Sāñchi and Bharhut Stūpas. An image of Lotus Goddess is found

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1. Indian Art, p. 53.

on a terracotta plaque from Basārh, dating from about third century B.C. She stands on a lotus pedastal, with two lotus blossoms and two buds at her sides. The elephants are missing and she has been shown with wings. It is a rare and astonishing feature for India. Wings are very common in Western tradition. But the Indian figures betray connection with that tradition[2]. Writing about goddess Lotus-Śri-Lakṣmi. H. Zimmer observes, "She is visible everywhere in the monuments of early Buddhist art, and in the works of classic period she stands triumphant on every side. To-day she is the greatest power in the orient."[3] The lotus is a sign of her presence even where her human features do not appear. A characteristic attitude of the goddess known as Padmahastā, is taken over in the iconography of Mahāyāna Buddhism by the universal savior Padmapāṇi, the greatest among the Bodhisattvas.

Prajna-Parmita is the highest feminine personification in Mahayana Buddhism. As Lakṣmi is the consort of Viṣṇu, so is Prajñā-Pārmitā the female aspect of universal Buddha. She symbolises the supreme wisdom that guides and enlightens. The Buddhist goddess is invariably characterised by the lotus seat and the lotus at her left supporting the manuscript. In the Buddhist philosophy the lotus is the symbol of enlightenment that dispels the darkness of the naive ignorance inherent in all living beings. "The lotus symbol, which originally gave birth to beings and existences in unending succession, now carries the powerful wisdom of Nirvāṇa : the word that puts an end to all individual existence, whether in heaven or on earth."

According to Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa[4] "The lotus means the waters, and this earth is a leaf thereof ; even as the lotus leaf here lies spread on the waters, so this earth lies spread on waters." The earth is conceived of as resting on the back of the waters. This symbolism sufficiently accounts for the use of the expanded lotus flower in iconography and architecture as the typical support of a figure and building. Furthermore, the lotus is represented as a direct source of wealth, as in the case of Padma-nidhi of Kubera.

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[2] Myths and Symbols in Indian Art and Civilization, p. 93.

[3] Ibid., p. 96.

[4] Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa, VII, 4.1.8.

On the other hand, the more edifying symbolism of purity is drawn from the fact that the lotus leaf is not wetted by the water that rests on it, nor is the flower soiled by the mud from which it springs.[5] In the words of Coomarswami[6], "So, too, the lotus represents the Tree of Life, this cosmic tree which sprang originally from the navel of Varuṇa, leaving the deities with in its branches, when later it is represented as rising from the navel of Nārāyaṇa or Viṣṇu and bearing Brahmā......"

The lotus formula of a garland is in fact the motif of a lotus rhizome originating in the waters and borne by Yakṣas. Vincent Smith regarded it as Roman and Syrian motif. Vogel remarked, "by what route or means this popular motif reached India is still a mystery." This mystery can be solved only by accepting its origin on the Indian soil. At Bharhut and Sāñchi the rhizome itself is represented simply as a smooth round stem, but the stem at Amrāvati is most elaborately decorated. In some cases the termination of the garland is made to correspond to its origin, so that it seems to enter at one end the mouth of a dwarf Yakṣa or the Jaws of a Makara. The formula occurs also in the Gandhāra art.

Padmavaravedikā

The highest perfection of Kuṣāṇa art at Mathurā is seen in the carvings of its railings, all of which were decorated with motifs and designs showing great originality and a richness greater than that at Bharhut. Here the artists have accepted the old motif of lotuses and also introduced many new ones. Railings ornamented with lotus designs were styled as Padmavaravedikā. The pillars and the cross bars are profusely decorated with lotus designs of various forms. The coping stones of the railing are decorated with a number of floral and animal designs. In the words of V.S. Agrawala[7], "Thus we see that the earlier sculptors who organised the magnificent Padmavaravedikā in its fulfledged form round a stūpa were working on the basis of an extensive reportoire of motifs selected both for their decorative and religious significance but obviously inclined more on the aesthetic side. The artists were conscious of their obligation to the ornamental side of such an important architectural element as the Vedikā which conferred on stūpa its full glory." The lotus garland with which the Vedikā was actually decorated deserves special mention. It consisted of thousand of flowers interwoven with many varieties of floral wealth and foliage. It was regarded as the choicest gift offered to adorn the body of the stūpa. F.D.K. Bosch observes[8], "The notion of the lotus as the very symbol of life risen from the waters lends a new aspect to the relation between this plant and other living creatures, particularly its fellow-plants."

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[5] Coomarswami, Yakṣas, Part II, p. 57.
[6] Ibid., p. 57.
[7] Indian Art, pp. 222-223.

"If we now proceed to enquire into the nature and meaning of the mystic lotus we should concentrate on the fact that according to the products of art we discussed above, the whole creation, represented by a lotus-plant has its beginning and origin in the primeval lotus which feeds and supports it just as the primeval waters are the foundation of all things created and are identified with the dharma, so the primeval lotus, the symbol of these waters, is the foundation, their pratishṭhā, and at the same time the supporter of the universe, the dharma of the universe, for dharma means supporter."[9] At the dawn of each Kalpa, Brahmā reemerges from a lotus that has blossomed out of the navel of Viṣṇu.

Pūrṇa-Kumbha

Throughout the history of Indian art Pūrṇa-Kumbha is the commonest of all auspicious symbols, employed equally by all sects, and occurring not only in India proper, but also Farther India and Indonesia.[10] The earliest examples in art are found at Bharhut and Sāñchi, in connection with the representation of Śri-Lakṣmi. The following representations are worth mentioning :

1. The goddess standing or seated on a lotus.
2. The goddess standing or seated on a lotus and the lotus rises from a Pūrṇa-Kumbha.
3. The Pūrṇa-Kumbha alone with a mass of lotus flowers and leaves rising from it.

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[8] The Golden Germ, p. 82.
[9] The Golden Germ, p. 122.
[10] Yakṣas, part II, p. 61.

All the three types are symbols of abundance. In Jaina art the Pūrṇa-Kumbha is one of the eight auspicious symbols and also one of the fourteen lucky dreams of Trisalā. The Pūrṇa-ghata is carried as a symbol by Nāgas and river-goddesses. It is used in the worship of the deities on any auspicious occasion the Pūrṇa-Kumbha is always there. It is present in the reception of guests and in the festival decoration of cities and shrines. In marriages, a pair of full vessels are commonly placed at the entrance of the house. The same is done in case of shrines also on Amarāvati reliefs, a frieze may consist entirely of a row of full vessels. As an architectural motif it occurs in rich and varied forms.

According to Coomarswami, the Pūrṇa-Kumbha is plainly thought of as an exhaustible vessel, but the actual form is associated with vegetation. It should be distinguished from the plain jars sometimes carried by certain deities, "the Pūrṇa-Kalaśa is generally a globular vessel with a foot and a constricted neck ; the body of the vessel is invariably encircled by a ribbon or other band, tied with knots and serving the purpose of a magical fence ; from the mouth there rises a spray or bunch of lotus flowers or leaves hang over symmetrically on each side of the mouth like the volutes of palmette." This form is essentially that of flower base, combining a never failing source of water with an ever-living vegetation. This type is of the widest distribution in later art.

The Pūrṇa-Kumbha a symbol of plenty is in fact a life symbol. It symbolises the expression of a wish that the recipient, or in general all those present, they enjoy health, wealth and long life. In the words of Coomarswami,[11] "As the motif has a continuous history from the Śuṅga period onwards, and there is not the slightest reason to suppose that it was either invented or borrowed precisely at the moment when stone came into use as a building material, we must infer an antecedent history of the motif on Indian soil."

The Mathurā school of Art has yielded numerous examples of large ornamented bows. They are being supported by a Yakṣa or Śri-Lakṣmi or some goddess of plenty. Vogel has suggested that these vases supported on pedastals represent the Buddha's begging bowl, and were set up to receive offerings of the faithful devotees. A similar practice is found in Burma. But Coomarswami has very ably contradicted this theory of Vogel on the following grounds:

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[11] Yakṣas, part II, p. 63.

1. The vases are unlike a begging bowl in form.
2. The decoration of a begging bowl is strictly forbidden.
3. The associated figures on the pedastals are always connected with the idea of liquid.

In the words of V.S. Agrawala[12], "Pūrṇa-Kumbha, pot and foliage, Full Vase, was the symbol of plenty and creativity. The water in the jar is the sap or humidas radicle and the over-flowing leaves and flowers typify life itself with its many fold blessings and joys. The human body is the Pūrṇa-Ghata and so is the created cosmos." The Pūrṇa-Kalaśa of the Ṛigveda is filled with immortal sap of Soma, the Pūrṇa-Kumbha of Atharvaveda with streams of Ghrita and Amrita. Pūrṇa-Kumbha-Nāri is mentioned in the Atharvaveda. Pūrṇa-Ghata-Kanyā walks in the Lumbini procession of Māyā Devi. In Jaina manuscripts it is given an anthromorphic form and in religious worship it is regarded as the symbol of Trinity.

There is a story in Kalingabodhi-Jātaka that once Ānanda, wishing to plant a seed of the great Bodhi-tree, before the gateway of the Jetavana, cleared out a pit for the tree to stand in, and in it he placed a golden jar which was filled with earth moistened with fragrant water. The instant the seed was dropped in the jar, before the eyes of all, up sprang as broad as a plough-head a bo-sapling, fifty cubits tall. On the four sides and upwards shot forth five great branches of fifty cubits in length like the trunk. So stood the tree, a very Lord of the forest already, a mighty miracle.[13]

Pūrṇa-Kumbha as the Womb

In the rituals of Navapatrikā during the Durgā-Pūjā, a Yantra called Sarvatobhadramanḍala is drawn upon the ground. It is simply a Tāntric diagram depicting the pictures of female generative organ. Then a Pūrṇa-Kumbha is to be placed on this diagram. The Pūrṇa-Kumbha is an earthen vessel filled with water. Here it symbolises a female womb. The figure of a baby is drawn on the surface of the vessel. The open mouth of the Pūrṇa-Kumbha is covered with five kinds of leaves, and a coconut, smeared with vermillion, is placed on it. According to D.P. Chattopadhyaya[14], it is a simple fertility rite by which the plants are brought into contact with the female reproductive organ, evidently to ensure multiplication. In the words of N.N. Bhattacharyya[15], "That the main purpose of the Yantra and the Pūrnaghaṭa, referred to above, is to identify natural fertility with human fertility, so that the productivity of nature becomes increased by the imitation of female reproductivity........."

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[12] Indian Art, p. 51.
[13] Quoted from "The Golden Germ", p. 157.

In the Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa, Pūrṇa-Kumbha is equated with the womb of the Mother Goddess. The Kathāsaritsāgara identifies Kumbha with the uterus. The Pūrṇa-Kumbha as representation of Mother Goddess still survives in many festivals.

Chakra

It is the symbol of the Sun or time. It is identified with the supreme moral order in the form of Dharma-Chakra or Sudarśana-Chakra, both having a thousand spokes. The worship of the Chakra represents the supreme ideals underlying the cosmic manifestation on the one hand and of the individual life on the other. In the words of V.S. Agrawala[16], The Cosmos is known as Brahmāṇḍa-Chakra ; the World order as Saṁsāra-Chakra; Human Life as Bhave-Chakra ; the flux of men's action as Karma-chakra; the Revolving Wheel of Time as Kāla-Chakra; the Moral order which governs the universal and the individual ordinances as Dharma-Chakra. The Chakra stands for the perfect cycle of life which is at once beautiful and accessible to all, and therefore, called Sudarśana-Chakra, the wheel of the Divine Preserver of world and life, Bhagavān Viṣṇu. The Divine is Transcendent creator but His immanent presence becomes manifest as the dynamic Chakra or Revolving Wheel."

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[14] Lokayata, p. 2946.
[15] Indian Mother Goddess, p. 42.
[16] Chakra-Dhvaja, preface.

The Chakra has a centre and the circumference. It represents the law of unity in diversity. In the Indian tradition the Chakra began from the Ṛigveda which may have any number of spokes from one to one thousand. According to the Ṛigveda[17] the Ageless wheel revolves round the heaven of cosmic order. The basic feature of the Chakra is its cyclic movement in a rhythmic order which brings blessings and happiness. Thus its meaning has a universal appeal. It stands for the supreme law of the cosmos and human life. The Chakra is a frequently repeated motif in the railings and gateways of the stupas at Sāñchi. The worship of the Chakra was a well established cult known as Chakra-Mahā. Worship of the Chakra is forcefully demonstrated in early Indian art at Bharhut, Sāñchi, Bodhgayā, Amarāvati and Mathurā. On the Prasenajit pillar at Bharhut the worship of the Dharma-Chakra is clearly depicted. At Bharhut the old Sārnātha style of placing the Dharma-Chakra on the heads of the four lions can be very well seen. At Sāñchi the number of scenes showing the cult of the Chakra is much greater.

In Jainism a regular worship of the Chakra can be seen from the earliest times. Jaina Stūpa at Kankāli Ṭīlā bear witness to the deification of the Chakra. The motif of the Chakra-stambha framing a Tirthaṅkara image together with an Aṣṭamaṅgalaka Mālā is represented on the Āyāgapaṭṭas. Sometimes the whole Āyāgapaṭṭa is conceived in the form of a Chakra supported on the arms of eight maidens of space. We also find the depiction of a Chakra-paṭṭa on a tablet of homage in the ancient Jaina art. All these facts indicate that the Jainas had a deep feeling of reverence for the Chakra-symbol. In fact in worshipping the Chakra, the Buddhists and the Jainas were following the age old Vedic tradition.

The conception of the Chakra was perfected in the Vedas as the symbol of creation and of time. It is a symbol of movement. The basic quality of the Chakra is seen in its dual characteristic of ascent and descent. The Ṛigveda conceives of it as the black and the white Rajas forces. "Both space and time are the outcome of movement and both are symbolised as Chakra. In temporal

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17. Ṛigveda, 1.164, 11.

aspect past, present and future form a Chakra, and in the spatial the earth, sky and heaven. Both of these are symbolised in nature as Sun and therefore Mārtaṇḍa or Sūrya is conceived of as the Great Wheel."[18] The number of spokes in Kāla-chakra can be three, five, six, twelve, fifty and even a thousand. The Chakra in the Ṛigveda has been described as Sanemi and Sanābhi. Nemi is the circumference and nābhi is the centre of the wheel. Buddhists borrowed this description of Chakra almost verbatim for the Dharma-Chakra. Some important facts about the Buddhist Chakra are specifically mentioned. It was a Chakra of one thousand spokes, emitting rays of light with a centre, a full vase and a svastika mark which again was the symbol of Sun.

The worship of the Chakra is popular even now. During the marriage ceremony the wheel of the potter is worshipped. All the women of the house visit the potters wheel and perform the ceremony there. V.S. Agrawala rightly observes, "There is hardly any other cult of such universal hold as Chakra-worship." "In short the Chakra as the symbol of the Cosmos, Time, Supreme Law and finally of the Divine Will as expressing itself through Man and society, was the common heritage of the entire Indian people."

During the Gupta period we see that the worshippers of Viṣṇu regarded the Chakra as the Sudarśana-Chakra of Nāyāyaṇa as the Buddhists worshipped it as the Dharma-Chakra of the Buddha. In the sphere of polity the theory of a Chakravarti king paying homage to the Dharma-Chakra was personified as Chakra-puruṣa. It is graphically represented on the Chakra-Vikrama coin of Chandragupta II of the Gupta dynasty.

The Bhāgavata teachers included the entire field of knowledge and of the scriptural texts as the two forms of Sudarśana-Chakra. They defined Chakra-Sudarśana as the principle of life, Divine Power, Activity, Energy, Emotions, Ideals, Exertion and will. In the words of F.D.K. Bosch[19], "Whatever may have been the reason of this, it is certain that as a brahmamūla-symbol the

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18. V.S. Agrawala, Chakra-Dhavaja, p. 54.
19. The Golden Germ, p. 159.

Chakra had to play a no less important part when it appeared as the top-piece of the cosmic column, identified with the stem of the tree, and so occupied the place which Sūrya usually takes on reaching the zenith of its orbit and forming the stambha-top." He further observes, "So it is little wonder that amongst the brahmamūla symbols Chakra ranks foremost and as a stambha-top occurs more frequently than any emblem." This is shown by many Borobudur relief pictures of standards topped big Chakra. There is a very remarkable picture on the Chinese Tripiṭaka. It shows a lotuspond from whose centre the leafy stem of a lotus winds upwards, the stem being topped by an upright wheel.

Triśūla-Chakra

This symbol is particularly known in the Buddhist art. But it is not uncommon in Jainas and various Hindū sects. It represents a wheel topped by a trident. This symbol has been used in many ways on the monuments of Bharhut, Sāñchi and Amarāvati. Often as a top for stambhas, thrones and Toraṇa-architraves. It also occurs as a decorative motif of railings.

"Since the Triśūla-chakra emblem appears to belong to the vast group of representations reducible to Tree-symbolism, it is easily understood that the emblem, being pre-Buddhist, pre-Jaina and pre-Hindū, became the common property of all religious sects and more particularly became closely related to Buddhism[20]. The whole emblem came to be regarded as Triratna-symbol.

J. Knebel was the first scholar who pointed out that the ornament appearing on the walls of Central-Javanese and Khmer buildings is closely related to Triśūla-Chakra emblem of the Buddhist monuments.

Svastika

It is a solar symbol which indicates the four armed pattern of the cosmos. It is spreading in the four directions. The cult of Four Regions was developed from this symbol. The Ṛigveda contains this doctrine of Chaturmahādiśah and its followers in popular cult were known as Diśāvratika. Each Chakra carries with in its womb a Svastika formed by combining four right angles of 90° each.

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[20] The Golden Germ, p. 163.

Svastika is one of the most auspicious symbols which is based on the four-fold divine principle. In Indian art and mythology Brahmā has been shown as four-faced. The Dharma is also supposed to be Chatuśpād. The four Vedas, four Devas, four Varṇas, and four Aśramas etc. are associated with the most ancient symbol of Svastika. In the early art of India some remarkable motifs have been found. It includes a double-headed Eagle also. It is found at Sirkap, in Taxilā. Some of this figure contain the symbol of Svastika. Amongst pre-Mauryan relics those found inside the oldest known stūpa at Piprahwā in modern district Basti on the Nepal border are most important. It includes the Svastika symbol stamped on gold leaf. More than a thousand steatite seals found at Mohenjo-daro alone occupy an important place in the art of Indus valley. These seals were a mass produced commodity. According to Wheeler they were little masterpieces of controlled realism, with a monumental strength, in one sense out of all proportion to their size and in another entirely related to it, their average attainment being exceedingly high.[21] The engraved designs on the seals include a wide range of animals with some pictographic signs. Some have only linear designs including the Svastika.

The Punch-marked coins have been found all over India from Taxilā to Mysore. They show more than five hundred symbols. The dating of these coins is fairly known as 800 to 200 B.C. Svastika is an important symbol on these coins. Sometimes the Svastika shows four balls round its four arms. In the words of V.S. Agrawala[22], "The story of the signs and symbols as gathered from coins, sealings, pottery and beads manufactured during this long period of about 800 years is a commentary on the visual representation and meaning of Indian art."

Makara

According to E.W. Hopkins, "Between man and beast there is, to a savage, only a linguistic difference ; in other respects the beast is man's younger brother." When the man is dead his soul is liable to pass into the body of animal. The beast may be the ancestor of a clan of men. Animals are worshipped as a great living powers and as ghosts. It is supposed that the animals have a mysterious power and strength to which men cannot attain. The very strong animals are worshipped for their prowess. The lion in Africa, the tiger in India, the bear in America and the bull in Greece and Egypt are worshipped for their strength. All over the world those animals which have provided men with food have been worshipped as givers of life. Amerind worshipped the beavers for their wisdom. Accident is also responsible for the worship of many individual animals. Among fishes, holy to the Syrians, the Shark is most widely worshipped in the Pacific, obviously because it is most feared. Manu was saved form the deluge by a fish. In the words of E.W. Hopins[23], "The only really divine water-animal in India is the crocodile, which shows no trace of totemism and is now revered because he is connected with a god, originally because he was feared. As water repels evil spirits, so fishes, because of their water-nature, when painted on the wall, guard in India against demons."

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[21] Wheeler, The Indus Civilization, p. 70.
[22] Indian Art, p. 70.

The Makara is obviously a symbol of the waters, more specifically of the Essence in the waters, the principle of life. Makara is a well-known vehicle of Varuṇa and the banner of Kāmadeva. He has also been shown as the Vehicle of various Yakṣas as well as of the river-goddess Gaṅgā. "It occurs on the spandrils of early tympanus, on the architraves of early torṇas, and in the analogous position on throne-backs ; as a headdress ornament, earring or otherwise in jewellery ; isolated on medallions of railling pillars or cross-bars ; and very appropriately as a Soma-sūtra or gargoyle carrying away the offering-water from a Lingam shrine."[24]

It appears in the plant style as the source of lotus vegetation. Many decorative motifs have developed from this variety. Makara toraṇa is a most popular decorative motif. At times one or more dwarf Yakṣas are riding the monster. Sometimes they are dragging an unseen object from its mouth. In one example Śri-Lakṣmi is dragging the lotus rhizome from the jaws of a Makara. Sometimes a man or some animals are represented as emerging from its open jaws.

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[23] Origin and Evolution of Religion, p. 36.

[24] Coomarswami, Yakṣas, part II, p. 47.

In the early Indian art Makara has been represented with a crocodile head, with horns and pointed teeth. They have four or two dog-like legs and a scaly body with tail. At the Lomas Riṣi cave the Makara shows a more pointed reptilean tail with spines and no legs. The later mediaeval representations, such as those with floriated tails in Gupta and later art resemble land animals in Hoysala and later Southern art. Stutterheim observes, "In all these motifs the permanent element would be the symbolical meaning, and the mutable element the external form." Original types of Makara persist to modern times.

The full-face Makara as an architectural motif appears in late Gupta period. Earlier to it it has been found as a small metal ornament at Taxilā and as a part of headdress at Amrāvati. The Makara-vaktra takes its place as the crowning element of the Chaitya-window arch as a fully developed Makara-toraṇa. It is also known as Kīrtimukha. In the words of Coomarswami, "In all probability the Kīrtimukha had no original connection with the makara, but that it was thus interpreted after the Gupta period is clearly established both by the term makara-vaktra, and by the fact that vegetation or pearl garlands, are regularly shown as hanging from the jaws ; as a rule the under-jaw is absent, or concealed by this vegetation. The same forms, for which one can hardly doubt an ultimately Indian origin, occur, frequently in mediaeval European art." Codrington remarks, "the Makara" is undoubtedly Indigenuous. Coomarswami does not believe in Stutterheim's suggestion that the Makara has a hellenistic source. Makara motif is of rarest occurrence in the art of Gandhāra.

The Nītiśataka of Bhartrihari indicates that there was some legendary connection of Makaras with pearls. It was a proverbial example of courage if one could extract a pearl from the jaws of a Makara. The motif of pearls extended between the open jaws of Makara is exemplified in Mathurā sculptures. The motif of pearl-garland suspended from Kīrtimukha jaws is a common architectural ornament. In several representations a dwarf Yakṣa is removing some small object from the jaws of the Makara. In others an armed warrior is fighting within the jaws of the monster. Heine-Geldern has made a suggession that pearls of such supposed origin may have been regarded efficacious in the preparation of aphrodisiacs. We must note that Makara is not an isolated type, but belongs to a considerable group of mythical creatures.

In addition to Makara the water-horse, water-elephant, water-bull and winged water-lion are found in association with Yakṣas or with vegetation in the plant style. It appears that these animals were conceived as existing in all three worlds, heaven, earth and waters. A few words may be said about the Grāha, a Varuṇa's creature according to the epic list. The word means "seizer". The Grāha inhabits a lake to which an elephant has also repaired. It is clear from the epic passage that Garuḍa carries of both with a view to devouring them. The story has persisted upto modern times in the legend of Gajendramokṣa. "Viṣṇu, riding appears to rescue the elephant, his devotee from the clutches of the Grāha, which represents the share of the world. There is a corresponding series of representations in art, from which it only appears that the exact nature of the monster has never been established."

Thus we see that from its appearance in Indian art, over the entrance to the cave of Lomas Riṣi in Bihar, the Makara was represented as a fantastic quadruped with a crocodile-like head, a snout curled backward and a scaly crest on the tail. In the second stage of development, represented at Bharhuta, the crocodile-head with curled up snout is maintained but the mouth is now wide open, the jaws are provided with sharp teeth, the hind legs have disappeared and the body is transferred into a scaly tail rolled up volute-wise. At Mathurā and Amrāvati the monster is seen with ram's horns and the body of a fish with cadual fin. After sometime the monster reappears in Gupta art and at Seven Pagodas. Now the fish like tail is replaced by a developed bush tail, the front legs have disappeared and the head is provided with an elephant's trunk with the tactual organ curling forward. In its South-Indian mediaeval form the Makara is represented with ornate bush tail, elephantine head and body of an elephant or rhinoceros. According to F.D.K. Bosch[25], "the Makara-figure is but a minor part in a vast group of closely interwoven symbols and motifs. If, finally, we ask again whether the frequent application of the monster-motif has an other and deeper root than the mere decorative one we shall have a much wider field to explore and far more intricate problems to solve than in the present part of enquiry which is merely concerned with problems of a morphological and comparative nature."

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[25] The Golden Germ, p. 22.

Parvan and Makara

In all cases at Bharhuta, where the lotus ornament has been employed for decorating the copings of the Stūpa railing, the Parvan appears in a very simple form. At Sāñchi the Parvans are practically the same as at Bharhuta, but the scale leaf usually is a little shorter and is sometimes coupled with a second leaf placed under the stem giving Parvan somewhat the appearance of a monster-head with open jaws. At Gandhāra a motif of imbricated roll garland borne on the shoulders of the male figures is seen. After having reached Mathurā and Amrāvati, this motif exerts an influence on the Indian lotus ornament giving rise to remarkable mixed forms. As for Gandhāra Art, it is not of great importance because Kalpalatā is here treated as a mere decorative element in which Parvans are lacking. The garland can be seen in the open mouth of the Makara at Mathurā and Amrāvati. In fact in the garland the Makara has replaced the Parvan. On the door jamb of a temple at Māmallapuram Makara-heads are easily recognizable on a relief-scene of the Kailāsanātha temple at Kanchipuram, the monster head has replaced the Parvan. According to F.D.K. Bosch this replacement would not have been possible but for the Indian conception of a certain relationship between Makara and Parvan which made them interchangeable. Fortunately, the material which is scanty in India may be supplemented with data from the flourishing period of Central-Javanese art. In this art both the Makara and the Kalpalatā to which the Parvan belongs by nature are the favourite decorative motifs. In the words of Bosch,[26] "In conclusion I want to point out a peculiarity clearly illustrating the relation between Parvan and Makara. They resemble each other not merely morphologically but they also share an important biological function, viz. the power to bring forth vegetation." The Indians saw in the node of the lotus plant with its jaw-like scale-leaves a monster head with gaping mouth.

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[26] The Golden Germ, p. 34.

Varuṇa as the Lord of Waters

Varuṇa is one of the most impressive gods in the Vedic Pantheon. In the word of Barth, "if we combine into one all the attributes of sovereign power and majesty which we find in the other gods, we will have the god Varuṇa." Thus Varuṇa, as Lord of cosmic order, has control of the waters. He bears the title Samudriya and is called a hidden ocean. The fact that the rain falls from the sky proves that there is in the sky an invisible ocean as the source of supply. So Varuṇa by a natural development, comes to be the lord of the earthly as well as of the heavenly waters. Makara is a symbol of waters. Hence the Lord of the Waters has Makara as his vehicle.

The word Makara occurs in vedic literature only in the Vājaseyani Saṁhitā. But the horned jhaṣa of the Flood legend may be equated with the Makara. Both the names occur in the Epic list of sea-monster. They include Timi, Makara, Jhaṣa, Kūrma, Grāha etc. which are Varuṇa's creatures. Later Varuṇa is regularly seated on a Makara. We can safely assume that Makara was a symbol of Varuṇa at a period earlier then that for which we have positive evidence. It is a well-known fact that the fish Avatār of Viṣṇu in the Purāṇas derives from the fish form of Brahmā-Prajāpati. According to Coomarswami fish is a misnomer and sea-monster would be a better rendering. We can suppose that the sea-monster was originally a symbol of Varuṇa. The case of tortoise is analogous to that of the fish. This form is assumed by Viṣṇu to support Mount Manḍara at the churning of the ocean. In fact the churning of the ocean is a creation myth. In the Vājasaneya Saṁhitā[27], the tortoise is called "Lord of waters". Coomarswami observes,[28] "in Av., XIX, 53, 10, as Kaśyapa, the tortoise is again identified with Prajāpati and called "Self-existent", a previous identification of the tortoise with Varuṇa may be reasonably inferred."

Association of Makara with Kāmadeva

Makara generally means the waters, more specifically the essence in the waters. Hence the association of Makara with Kāmadeva or any deity of fertility is quite natural.

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27. XIII, 31.
28. Yakṣas, part II, p. 53.

In the Epic Kāmadeva is identified with Pradyumna, son of Krisṇa. He is Makara-dhvaja In mediaeval texts Kāmadeva's constant epithet is Mākara-dhvaja' It should be noted here that Kāmadeva is a Yakṣa and identical with the Buddhist Māra. He is also a form of Agni, and Agni is born of the waters. Evidence of an earlier cult of Pradyumna-Kāmadeva has been recognised in the Besnagar Makara-dhvaja of the Śuṅga period. Kāmadeva with Makara-dhvaja is represented with Rati at Badami at the Kailāsanātha, Elorā and elsewhere. In two Gandhāra reliefs his daughters bear a Makara standard. It is worth mentioning that nearly all the vehicles by which the vegetal divinities are supported can be shown to be connected with the waters. Makara is the commonest of all the vehicles. River goddess Gaṇgā has a Makara as her vehicle while Yamunā is given a tortoise.

The Moon is a Navagraha group has a Makara vehicle. Umā has also been shown with a Makara-vehicle. There is also a rare coin of Samudragupta, with a standing goddess on a Makara Vāhanam. Burgess called her Pārvati, but Allan identified her with Gaṅgā. According to Coomarswami either identification is possible. Pārvati is sometime called the sister of Gaṇgā. The ninth Jaina Tīrthaṅkara is also associated with the Makra. All these facts prove the popularity of this symbol in ancient India.

Garuḍa

He is the vehicle of Viṣṇu, and is very frequently introduced into the pictures of the Vaiṣṇavas carrying the deity with or without Lakṣmī. He is often depicted as half-bird and half-man. There are pictures in which Garuḍa has a red comb and beak; his robe is red; his face, arms, legs, and pinions green; the feathers of his wings and tail, green and blue. Green, red and blue are the predominant colours in the pictures of Garuḍa. In fact this man-eagle is the personification of sky, the ethereal vehicle of Viṣṇu as the Sun. In the words of V.S. Agrawala[29], "Suparṇa, the Eagle which in the same as Garuḍa being the symbol of Sūrya, Time, Saṁvatsara, Agni and for the matter of that of each god associated with movement. The universal spirit is Suparṇa or Eagle and its individual counter part on earth is a Quail. The former dives at the latter to hold it in its clutches. The Garuḍa-Nāga motif of art is an extension of the Suparṇa myth. In the Ṛigveda we read of one, two, three, are many Suparṇas." They were represented at Sāñchi and Mathurā. Sometimes they were depicted as decorative motifs on friezes, coping-stones and lintels of early Indian art, and at other times they were shown in combating poses.

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[29] Indian Art, p. 51.

In the living Indian tradition as well as in the sacrificial goblet of the Sumerian period of 2600 B.C., the classical antagonist of the fabulous serpent is the babulous bird. The goblet of king Gudea of Lagash depicts a warlike winged bird-monster, standing erect on eagle claws and with the forepaws of a lion. Such birds represent the ethereal realm just as the serpents represent the terrestrial waters. They are champions respectively of heaven and of earth. In the mythology of the Greeks the eagle belongs to Father Zeus and Serpents attend the goddess Hera. There are many episodes delineating the opposition of the two. According to Homer's Iliad, an eagle appeared to the assembled Greek heroes, one day during the sieze of Troy. The bird was observed scaring in the sky having a bleeding snake in its talons. Kalchas, the priest-soothsayer interpreted it as indicating the triumph of the Greeks over the Trojans. In the words of Heinrich Zimmer,[30] "The heavenly bird ravaging the serpent symbolized to him the victory of the patriarchal, masculine, heavenly order of the Greeks over the female principle of Asia and Troy." The two-fold symbol of eagle and serpent outlasts the ages. According to Zimmer Mesopotamian Sumer may well have been the cradle out of which this motif made its way to Greece and ancient India. The two serpents were regarded in Mesopotamia as symbolics of the god of healing. In Greece they became attached to the god of medicine, Asklepios." The eagle represents this, higher, spiritual principle, released from the bondage of matter and soaring into the translucent ether, mounting to its kin, the stars, and even to the supreme divine being above them. On the other hand, the serpent is life-force in the sphere of life matter." In Western tradition the spiritual antagonism of bird and serpent is commonly understood and stressed. The opposition as symbolized in India is strictly that of natural elements: Sun force against the liquid energy of earthly waters.

The word Garuḍa has been derived from the root gri which means, "to swallow". There is a popular belief that the Garuḍa

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30. Myths and Symbols in Indian Art and Civilization, p. 74.

possesses a mystic power against the fatal poison of the serpent. At Puri, persons suffering from snake-bite are taken to the main hall of the temple, where they embrace a Garuḍa pillar. Garuḍa is represented generally, with wings, human arms, vulture legs, and a curved beak-like nose.

In Cambodian Art not Viṣṇu alone but his whole temple is supported by the Garuḍa. The temple is regarded as an earthly copy of Vaikuṇṭha. It is an interesting point to note that Viṣṇu is associated with both of eternal enemies. Zimmer, observes[31], "Śeṣa, the serpent endless, representative of the cosmic waters, who is the source of all water whatsoever, is his animal representative; but then so too is Garuḍa, the conquering principle, the snake's opponent. This is paradox with reason; for Viṣṇu is the Absolute, the all containing Divine Essence. He comprises all dichotomies. The Absolute becomes differentiated in polarised manifestations, and through these the vital tensions of the world-process are brought into existence and maintained."

The Matsya Purāṇa refer to a Garuḍa Purāṇa. But the copies of the work so entitled contain no particular reference to Garuḍa. There is a brief notice of the creation, but the greater part is occupied with the description of religious observances, sacred places and Tāntrika rituals. It also contains treatises on astrology, palmistry. precious stones and medicine. The latter portion, called the Preta Kalpa, is taken up with directions for the performance of obsequial rites. There is nothing in this Purāṇa to justify the application of the name. It is surprising to note that this work contains no account of the birth of Garuḍa.

The birth of Garuḍa

According to Mahābhārata Kadrū and Vinitā were the beautiful daughters of Prajāpati. Their husband was sage Kaśyapa. He granted each of them a boon. Kadrū requested that she might become the mother of a thousand Nāgas of equal splendour. Vinitā chose for two sons more powerful than those of her sister. In course of time Kadrū became the mother of a thousand Nāga sons and Vinitā produced two sons. The elder one was Aruṇa who became the charioteer of the Sun-god. The younger was Garuḍa. As soon as he was born, leaving his mother he flew up in the sky in order to seize the food which had been ordained for him by the Creator. According to some legends Garuḍa was the offspring of Kaśyapa and Diti. Edward Moor observes[32], "This all prolific dame laid an egg, which, it was predicted, would produce her deliverer from some great affliction: after a lapse of five hundred years, Garuḍa sprung from the egg, flew to the abode of Indra, extinguished the fire that surrounded it, conquered its guards, the devatās, and bore off the amrita, which enabled him to liberate his captive mother. A few drops of this immortal beverage falling on the species of grass called Kusa, it became eternally consecrated; and the serpents greedily licking it up, so lacerated their tongues with the sharp grass, that they have ever since remained forked; but the boon of eternity was ensured to them by their thus partaking of the immortal fluid." "Garuḍa is also proverbial, but not the utter destroyer of serpents, for he spared one, they and their archetype being, in reference to created beings, eternal. His continual and destined state of warfare with the serpent, a shape mostly assumed by the enemise of the virtuous incarnations or deficd heroes of the Hindūs, is a continued allegory of the conflicts between Vice and virtue, so infinitely personified."[33]

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[31] Myths and Symbols in Indian Art and Civilization, p. 76.

As the Rāmāyaṇa relates, it was Garuḍa who advised Ansumat, the grandson of Sagar to bring Gaṇgā on the earth to perform the funeral ceremonies of sixty thousand sons of Sagar, who had been reduced to ashes by the fury of the sage Kapila. Ansumat and his son Dilip were not able to bring Gaṇgā to the earth. At last Bhagiratha, great grandson of Sagar by a long course of austerities gained the favour of Brahmā and was ultimately successful in bringing Gaṇgā to the earth.

Garuḍa espoused a beautiful woman. The serpents being alarmed that his progeny might overpower them, waged a fierce war against him. But the Garuḍa came out victorious. He destroyed them all except one which he placed as an ornament about his neck. In the Elephantā cave Garuḍa is often seen with this appendage. One of the names of Garuḍa is Nāgāntaka. He was

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32. Hindū Pantheon, p. 277.
33. Ibid., p. 278.

of great help to Krişṇa in clearing the country round Dwarkā, from ferocious animals and reptiles. As the legend goes Viṣṇu had granted to Garuḍa the power of destroying his and Śiva's enemies, but forbade him to attack on a Brāhmaṇa or a pious person. When by mistake Garuḍa seized a pious man, he was punished by the scorching flame[34]. In the war of Laṅkā Garuḍa was of great use to Lord Rāma. Serpent-arrows of Rāvaṇa were destroyed by Garuḍa. Viswāmitra conferred upon Rāma the power of transforming his arrows into Garuḍa-Vānas.

The swan, the Guruḍa and the Bull are the vehicles respectively of Brahmā, Viṣṇu and Śiva. According to Paterson, these vehicles are supposed to have allusion to "Purity, Truth and Justice."

In the language of Malabar, Garuḍa is known by the name of Pranada. It is held there in great veneration, particularly by women. If this bird snatches a fish from their hand, they consider it most fortunate. From its sacredness, it is commonly termed the Brāhmaṇi kite. Edward Moor writes that Brāhmaṇi kite is very useful in the populous towns of India in removing carrion and filth, and is never killed. The usefulness of this bird was, perhaps, the cause of its obtaining, like the cow, a protecting legend in the popular superstition of the Hindūs ; and the veneration which, in different countries, we find paid to particular animals, may perhaps, be traced to similar sources of utility. "It is happy where religious prejudices originate from, and promote social convenience."[35]

The rape of the Nectar

By some false method Kadrū had made Vinitā her slave. The Ādiparva of Mahābhārata relates an interesting legend about it. Once Kadrū, the mother of serpents ordered her sister Vinitā to carry her to the abode of the Nāga's, situated in the womb of the sea. Garuḍa as his mother's order, carried the Nāgas there. After sometime the Nāgas asked Garuḍa to take them to some other beautiful island. Garuḍa woundered why he should always obey the serpents. Then his mother Vinitā told him how she had been made a slave by her sister. Now Garuḍa approached the Nāgas and asked, "What I am to bring or to know or what

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34. Asiatic Researches, Vol. V, p. 514.
35. Hindū Pantheon, p. 279.

deed of valour am I to accomplish whereby I may be freed from slavery?" The Nāgas answered, Do thou seize the nectar, then thou shalt be freed from slavery. O Bird."

As Garuḍa was very hungry, he asked his mother for food. Vinitā told him to go in the womb of ocean to the land of Niṣadas. She further directed to eat thousand of Niṣadas and fetch the nectar. She warned him not to devour a Brāhmaṇa. After being blessed by his mother Garuḍa flew and reached the land of the Niṣadas. He devoured thousands of them. After this meal he met his father Kaśyapa who inquired about his welfare. Garuḍa told him that he was still hungry. Kaśyapa gave him the information that in the heaven there was a lake in which an elephant and a tortoise were fighting in consequence of a feud dating from a previous existence. These two animals he might seize and satisfy his hunger. Having received his father's blessings Garuḍa reached that lake and seized the two animals. He flew up in the sky in search of a suitable place where he might devour them at his ease. On the request of a Rauhiṇa-tree Garuḍa touched its branch with his talons, but it broke. He saw that the Vālkhilyas were clinging to that branch. Afraid of harming these holy men, Garuḍa did not dare to drop that branch. Seizing the branch in his beak and holding the two animals in his clutches he flew about. At last his father saw his perplexity and showed him a high mountain where he could safely alight.

The Mahābhārata further relates how Garuḍa succeeded in winning the Soma after having crossed many hurdles. When Indra, the chief of gods hurled his thunderbolt at Garuḍa, the latter only dropped one of his feathers. Indra was moved by Garuḍa's valour and asked him for a boon. The Garuḍa chose that henceforth the serpents might become his food. It was granted and Indra concluded friendship with Garuḍa. The God told him a device to deceive Nāgas. The Garuḍa after taking the nectar placed it on Kusa-grass and asked the Nāgas to bathe before taking the heavenly drink. In the meantime Indra carried it away to heaven. And the Nāgas returning from their bath, found the the nectar gone. So they could only lick the sharp Kusa and the result was that they became double-tongued. Vogel[36] observes,

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[36] Indian Serpent-lore, p. 53.

"There is some reason to assume that in its more original form the eagle, like another Prometheus, brought down the Soma from heaven, not at the request of the snakes, but on behalf of mankind, so that mortal man might use it in his sacrificial rites."

This story of the rape of Soma is found in an ancient epic poem known as the Suparṇādhyāya. It appears that the Mahābhārata story is drawn from this earlier poem. Basically the story in both these versions is the same but for a few points of difference. In the Suparṇādhyāya the two sisters Kadrū and Vinitā are identified with earth and heaven. The birth of Aruṇ and Garuḍa is told in the same manner as in Mahābhārata, but no reference is made to the birth of the serpents. The Suparṇādhyāya has been made a subject of intensive study by a Swedish scholar, Jarl Charpentier. According to this author the story of Kadrū and Vinitā must have originally been an ancient animal saga in which the chief actors were the serpent and the eagle. It may be considered as the earliest specimen of an animal saga preserved in the world's literature.

In the Suparṇādhyāya the two sisters are described as animal-shaped, but in the Mahābhārata they have become quite anthropomorphic. In both these poems the story is closely connected with the ancient myth of the rape of the nectar by Suparṇa. The serpents who had assisted their mother Kadrū in deceiving Vinitā were in turn deceived by Vinitā's son. Thus the ancient myth has assumed a moral element. It also explains why Garuḍa feeds on the serpents. It is a favour bestowed on him by Indra as a reward for his courage and valour. It is also supposed that the white colour of the beak and neck of Garuḍa is due to his having carried the Soma.

In one respect the Garuḍa of nature agrees with the Garuḍa of legend. It is a deadly enemy of the serpents. In the words of Abbe Dubois[37], "It wages perpetual war upon lizards, rats, and especially snakes. When it espies one of the last-named, it swoops down upon it, seizes it in its talons, carries it to an enormous height, and then lets it drop. Following swiftly, it picks it up again, killed, of course, by its fall, and flies off with it to some neighbouring tree where it may be devoured at leisure." The enmity between the Garuḍa and the serpents has provided an inexhaustible theme for Indian story up the present day. The Kathāsaritasāgara of Somadeva agrees in substance with the Garuḍa legend of Mahābhārata. The Rape of the Soma by Garuḍa is illustrated in the Javanese temple Chandi Kedation.

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[37] Hindū Manners, Customs and Ceremonies, pp. 646 f.

Kāmadeva

He is the symbol of Love. In the words of Theodore Gold Stucker[38], "Kāma, or Kāmadeva, the Hindū god of Love, is one of the most pleasing creations of Hindū fiction. In Sanskrit poetry, especially that of a later period, he is the favourite theme of descriptions and allusions ; and mythology exalts his powers so much that it allows even to god Brahmā to succumb to it." The legends differ about the origin of Kāmadeva. According to some Purāṇas, he was originally a son of Brahmā. But according to others, he was a son of Dharma by Śraddhā. Śraddhā was a daughter of Dakṣa, who was one of the mind-born sons of Brahmā.

The wife of Kāmadeva is Rati. His daughter is Triṣā, and his son is Aniruddha. In fact the daughter symbolizes desire and the son is the unrestrained. The closest friend of Kāmadeva is Vasanta or Spring. Kāmadeva is represented as a handsome youth. His vehicle is a parrot and the Makara is his standard. Thus his one epithet is Makaradhvaja, the one who has Makara in his banner. Kāma has been represented as holding in his hands a bow made of sugar-cane, and strung with bees, besides five arrows, each tipped with the blossom of a flower which is supposed to conquer one of the senses. Kāmadeva is finally sculptured, with all his attributes, on the beautiful pantheistic choultry at Madurai.

On one occasion Śiva was very much annoyed with Kāmadeva and reduced him to ashes. But ultimately he was moved by the affliction of Rati and promised her that her husband should be reborn as a son of Krisṇa. Lord Krisṇa married Rukmini, who bore him Pradyumna, the god of Love. As legend goes, when Pradyumna was only six days old, he was stolen by a terrible demon Sambara; for the latter foreknown that Pradyumna would

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38. Sanskrit and Culture, p. 59.

be his destroyer. So the infant was thrown into the ocean where he was swallowed by a large fish. That fish was caught by fisherman and delivered to Mayavati, the wife of Sambara. When the fish was cut open. Mayavati was astonished to see the alive infant Pradyumna. Sage Nārada told her the real story and counselled her to rear the offspring of Lord Krișņa. She acted as advised by Nārada. When Pradyumna grew up, and learned his own story, he killed the demon Sambara. Mayavati was latter apprised by Lord Krișņa that she was the wife of Kamadeva in his prior existence and now she is the wife of Pradyumna.

In the words of Edward Moor[39], "Kama's five arrows are each tipped with the blossom of a flower, which is devoted to, and supposed to preside over a sense: the flowers are of a heating, inflaming quality; and are named, and well described, in these lines of the hymn, which paint Vasanta preparing the bow and shafts for his mischievous friend,

"He bends the luscious cane, and twists the string
With bees, how sweet ! but, ah ! how keen their sting ?
He with five flow rets tips thy ruthless darts,
Which through five senses pierce enraptured hearts :
Strong Champa, rich in odorous gold ;
Warm Amer, nursed in heavenly mould ;
Dry Nāgkesar in silver smiling ;
Hot Kittichum, our sense beguiling ;
And last, to kindle fierce the scholching flame,
Love's shaft, which gods bright Belā name."

In the month of Chaitra a festival with music and bathing is held in honour of Kāmadeva. On this occasion a popular short hymn is uttered :

"Hail, god of the flowery bow ; hail, warrior, with a fish on thy banner ; hail powerful divinity, who counseth the firmness of the sage to forsake him, and subduest the guardian deities of the eight regions. O Kandarpa ! thou son of Mādhava ! O Māra !

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39. Hindū Pantheon, pp. 296-297.

thou foe of Sambara ! Glory be to thee, who lovest the goddess Rati ; who springest from the heart. Glory be to Madana ; to Kāma ; to him who is formed as the God of gods ; to him, by whom Brahmā, Viṣṇu, Śiva, Indra, are filled with emotions of rapture. May all my mental cares be removed ! all my corporeal sufferings terminate ! May the object of my soul be attained, and my felicity continue for ever."[40]

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[40] Asiatic Researches, Vol. III, p. 278.

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